


apprenticeship
of
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by Fatima Meer

Illustrated by KAREN PILLAY
with a foreword by ALAN PATON



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APPRENTICESHIP OF A MAHATMA

by
FATIMA MEER

Illustrated by KAREN PILLAY
with a Foreword by
ALAN PATON

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Dedicated to
the Memory of
NANA SITA

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FOREWORD

“Apprenticeship of a Mahatma”, fills a long-felt need. It is a simply written story of the life of Mahatma Gandhi from his birth till his final departure from South Africa. It has also a concluding chapter which makes it clear that his twenty-one years in our country was an apprenticeship for the stupendous task he was to set himself, and that was nothing less than liberation of India. Gandhi succeeded—one might almost say single-handed though he would not have liked such a statement—in liberating India from the rule of Britain. The second part of his task, namely the liberating of India from racial and caste prejudice, he did not complete, but that was due to no defect in himself; such a liberation, of a country from prejudice and injustice, is never completed, and must be begun anew by every succeeding generation.

The virtue of Fatima Meer’s book lies in its simplicity. It will make the story of Gandhi real and interesting and intelligible to many of our younger people who would find it difficult to read a heavy and earnest book, omitting no detail of the life of the Mahatma. I hope that many of our boys and girls will read it, and that they will learn why the centenary of the birth of this man was honoured throughout the world. Who was to know that this baby, born on October 2nd, 1869, in the obscure town of Porbandar, India, was to live his life in such a way that his name is not likely to be forgotten so long as the human race inhabits this earth? There was indeed no sign of it. Not even during his growth to manhood did anyone recognise that this slight, shy, earnest (and sometimes naughty) boy, would one day move the hearts of millions of his countrymen, as no man had done before and as possibly no man will do again. Nor did anyone know then that when the news of his death would be flashed around the world, there would be in every country people filled with grief.

Gandhi had many faults, and of course they have all been remembered during his centenary year. Yet when he died people mourned because some goodness, some power for love and peace and justice, had been taken from the earth. Like most of us, he did not recognise some of his faults. But once he recognised a fault, it was doomed. His power of will, his power to decide to do this or not to do that, his power to abstain if he thought that abstinence was needed to make him a better instrument of God, was one of the things that brought him the admiration of millions. Yet he took no credit for it. He declared himself to be a frail being whom a puff of wind could blow away, and declared that the strength in him was nothing less than the spirit of God. Some people would think this conceit or arrogance, and some did; but most of them, seeing the frail body and the unconquerable spirit, believed that it was true.

It is this truth about Gandhi, the great soul in the insubstantial vessel, the immense power of will, the hatred of cruelty and injustice, the passionate and unceasing resistance to them, and the positive assertion of the good, that Fatima Meer conveys to us so simply and clearly. Her devotion to him, and her cool appraisal of him, are both evident in this slender book. It is a fine addition, not only to the literature of Gandhi, but to the literature of South Africa as well.

Alan Paton.

25th May, 1970.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

THIS ACCOUNT OF SOME of the most eventful episodes in the life of the man who survives in human memory as Mahatma Gandhi, is based on his writings—M.K. Gandhi, “My Experiments with Truth,” and “Satyagraha in South Africa”. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad. I have also drawn from Prabhudas Gandhi’s “My Childhood with Gandhiji” (Navajivan Publishing House), and from the Gandhi articles by Ranji S. Nowbath in the special “Leader” supplement marking the Gandhi Centennial. “The Leader”, (Pine Street, Durban) and from Francis Watson and Maurice Brown’s B.B.C. Production “Talking of Gandhi”, Longman Green and Company, Toronto.

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Fatima Meer,
June, 1970
Durban.

CONTENTS

Foreword		iv
Chapter 1	A Son for Putlibai	1
2	A Husband for Kastur	8
3	A Young Kathiawadi in London	18
4	An Indian Lawyer for Southern Africa	23
5	An Indian Politician in Natal	31
6	Advocate of the South African Indian Cause	37
7	A Family in Durban	47
8	In Quest of India	54
9	Mission to the Transvaal	57
10	Satyagraha	68
11	The Great March	88
Epilogue		106

Illustrations	Pages	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XVI
		XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII			

Chapter 1

A Son for Putlibai



Not far from the sea, in the port of the small princely state of Porbander, a deeply panelled heavy wooden door leads off the pavement into a courtyard, the floor of which is the roof of an underground tank storing household water. Dwelling rooms rise on three sides and windows with wooden shutters and ornamental stone grilles look down into the yard and onto the street.

In that house, on the second of October, 1869, Putlibai, the young wife of Kaba Gandhi, the twice widowed First Minister of State, retired into a long dark room on the ground floor. Isolated from all members of the family, and attended only by the midwife of the washerwoman's caste, she gave birth to her last child, a boy.

The incident caused a slight ruffle in the household routine. Kaba's aged mother, Tulsima, interrupted her morning paan-making ceremony and clambering down from her favourite perch on the large swing, called out the news. The wives of her six other sons and some granddaughters-in-law bustled together declaring Putlibai to be the favoured of the gods, for of her four children only one was a girl. Kaba was away on State business at the time. Putlibai's first born, nine-year old Lakshmi das, was at school and her daughter, six-year old Raliat, whom they called Goki, was consoling the distraught Karsandas who had never felt so deprived of his mother in all of his two and a quarter years of life as on that day.

For ten days according to custom, the new child lay close to his mother in the room where darkness was relieved only by the small flame of an oil lamp. The midwife came and went. Sometimes members of the family stood at the door and talked to Putlibai; at other times they asked the midwife to bring the new child to the doorway so that they might look at him. Once his grandmother Tulsima expressed the wish to hold and fondle him and show him to the fretting Karsandas and the anxious Goki. The midwife had brought him naked and Tulsima had received him in a 'pure' blanket, for it was believed that the things of the room of confinement were defiling.

They named him Mohandas, but soon found the name too big and too important for a child so small, so they began to call him Monya, and in tenderness, Manu. The time would come when the child would grow into a man so big and so important that all names would appear too small, and he would be called Mahatma (Great Soul), and Bapu (Father).

Mohandas could not know then that he had been born into a household where to rise above one's station in life and move away from one's caste-prescribed occupation had become a tradition with the family heads. His father, Kaba, was the fifth son of Utamchand whom they had called Ota Baba and who had gained a reputation as the most formidable statesman of his time in the Saurashtran States of Porbander, Junagadh and Rajkot. Ota's father had served as Secretary to the First Minister of Porbander and so had his father's father Harjiwan, and his grandfather Rahi, but Ota had become the Prime Minister himself and Kaba had followed in his footsteps. Ota had been as shrewd in statecraft as his distant predecessor had been in trade. Wise and timely compromise had been his technique in politics; yet he had a passion for justice and this trait was strong in his son Kaba, and would pursue Mohan to the end of his life. When the Rani-mata (queen mother), acting as regent had launched an unfair attack on the Keeper of Stores, Ota had

stood up in defence and defied the old dowager so vehemently that she had sent out her troops against him and hounded him out of Porbander.

In the years to come, Mohan's father, Kaba too would have his dispute with authority and be forced to leave the State, but at the time of Mohan's birth he was very much in the Rana Sahib's favour and he and all the members of his extended family lived in comfort, with many servants and secretaries in the great house that an ancestor had bought more than a hundred years before.

Mohan passed through the dim years of infancy in that ancestral home. Yet most of the house and its people remained strange to him, and he saw as home, the room in which he slept with his parents and was happiest when he was close to his mother and in the presence of his father.

The many aunts and uncles and the dozens of servants, moved in and out of his mind. He was never alone, and yet completely alone. He had little to say to his cousins who were as his brothers and he became tongue-tied in the presence of elders who scintillated around him like so many luminaries. He never sought their attention and approached them only in service, obeying implicitly every request they made. When the house filled at dinner-time with guests, and the children ran in and out among them, delighting in the attention they drew, he would creep away and watch from a distance, afraid of being spoken to, of a cheek being pinched, his head caressed.

He felt a great sense of calm when he was with his mother, but she was deeply religious and her life was immersed in performance of the many rituals and ascetic rites which she believed would make her and everything around her, good, and life after death, happy; so he did not have her as often as he wished. When his mother left him to attend to the many duties of the large household, he would be overcome with fear which in the beginning remained vague and amorphous, but which

later assumed many shapes—of thieves and serpents and ghosts: and loneliness and fear remained with him so that he could not sleep at night without a flickering light, without the comforting voice and generous arms of Rumbha the children's nurse who consoled him and counselled him to call on Rama and repeat Rama's name; for Rama, she told him, vanquished every evil and destroyed every monster; and she told him the story of Rama and his wife Sita, and of his devoted brothers Bharata and Lakshmana and his friend Hanuman, monkey-faced and monkey-tailed, and of Ravana, his enemy, whom he had destroyed. So Mohan came to know of God and His strength and he would repeat God's name after Rumbha—*Lam, Lam*—when he could not say Ram, and lull himself to sleep. The day would come when so calling he would lull himself to eternal rest.

He was afraid of the elders, of what they did and said, of what they made him do. At times, he was afraid too of his father, and yet he would be filled with a great calm, when he was with him. He would follow him to the temple yard close to the house, where the Diwan conducted lighter affairs of government, his hands cleaning and cutting vegetables the while, for the elder statesman did not like the hands to be idle while the mind worked, and Mohan would play with the pods and peels close by, his father's thoughts moving in his mind, and his father growing in it, like a god, to be loved and to be feared, though he wished to love him alone.

When he was old enough to remember and repeat words, they sent him to learn brief passages from the *Ramayana*, and were pleased when he could recite these correctly, and were not troubled at all that he did not understand them. Then when the time came for school, he joined the other children under the banyan tree and learnt to trace the letters of the alphabet and the figures of arithmetic in the sand. This was also a time for making friends, of joining in their play and helping in their

pranks. But Mohan could not play like other boys. He found himself constantly questioning what they did, and wondering whether the grown-ups would approve. There was the time when the children had stolen into the temple and run off with the images to play with them as toys. The theft had been discovered, the play intercepted, an inquiry held. It had been Mohan who had made a full confession. Yet his playmates did not dislike him, for he was gentle in his ways and humble in his criticisms. They sensed his implicit honesty and put it to use by appointing him as their referee when they wrestled with each other in the open square.

The teachers liked him because he was no trouble to them, because he carried out their orders perfectly, because it never occurred to him that he could be critical of them. But at times he exasperated them, as on the occasion when the inspector had given them a spelling test and he had spelt “kettle” wrongly. Taking his chance in a moment when the inspector had not been looking, the teacher had kicked his leg and pointed out the right spelling on his neighbour’s pages, but Mohan had responded by staring and growing red in the face and not altering the word at all.

When Mohan was about seven years old, his father suffered differences with the Rana Sahib and was forced to resign his post. Days of difficulty followed, but Mohan remained innocent of the conflict that ravaged the minds of his elders. His father moved to Rajkot, and he and his mother, brothers and sister went with him. It meant a change of schools and of friends, which he feared, for he had become conscious of his physical self and the image he saw embarrassed him deeply. Afraid of being stopped on the way and possibly ridiculed, he would literally run between school and home. He shunned athletics and sports, considering such physical feats beyond his wizened frame. He withdrew into his inner self and that self became precious to him, so that he suffered for days if the slightest

aspersion was cast upon his integrity. He searched for the source of that self and found it in the mythological figures that strode across the stage when the itinerant players pitched their tents—in Raja Harischandra who shed crown and kingdom to win truth and justice, in Shrawan Kumar who devoted himself to his parents, bearing them in baskets suspended on either side of a pole slung across his shoulder. He yearned to become Shrawan Kumar, to be in his own life, Raja Harischandra.

Then his father's health began to succumb to the ravages of old age. His asthma would become unbearable, and his neck and back would be caught in helpless pain. Mohan would rush home from school each day to nurse him and to massage the once strong limbs now grown frail, and there would be a glow of fulfilment about his ten young years, for he saw himself as Shrawan then. Nothing gave him as much pleasure as being at his father's side, silent and serving, listening to the wise discourse of the elders—Jains, Parsis, Muslims and Hindus—as they discussed religion, politics, and prices on the market. Sometimes the priest, Ladha Maharaj, would intone couplets and quadriles from the *Ramayana* and interpret their philosophy, and move him with their beauty.

But if Harischandra and Shrawan inspired him to heroic ideals, and Ladha Maharaj's splendid voice kindled in him a celestial flame, the temple, its highly coloured images and tawdry décor, repelled him. He went to it with his mother and her deep reverence moved him, but the experience of his own obeisance left him cold. He listened to the chantings from the *Bhagavad Gita* on the sacred days of Ekadashi, and was bored. Yet later, in London and in South Africa, he would be so overpowered by that scripture, that his whole life would become ordered by it. Now he saw only the ornate images and wondered that they were God, and he became conscious of the contradictions in religion. He picked up the *Manusmrithi* and was confused by its injunctions which violated the dietary code that he, his family

and his caste so rigidly followed.

He listened to the Christian missionaries who preached at the corner near his school, and his ears burned when he heard the abuse they poured against Hinduism.

He turned to his elders, but was met only by their blank faces and empty answers, and their impatience to be spared problems. So he turned away from people and scriptures, turned to his inner loneliness, and tried to dispel that loneliness through other things.

He took long walks into the country which bordered the city within a few miles, and often returned with a plant carefully removed from its natural soil, to nurture and make his own in the courtyard of their house. And he poured over his work laboriously and long and worked late into the night, until his mother would be moved to concern and plead with him to stop and rest awhile.

Childhood sped away all too quickly, and it was as if he had never been a child. He was thirteen and a man to be married.

Chapter 2

A Husband for Kastur



Mohan realised that he was to be married. Nobody told him, nobody asked him. The knowledge just came. He saw the activities; the summoning of jewellers and embroiderers, the making of papads and pickles, the long discussions about the guests to be invited, the guests to be feted, and of the journey to be made to the house of his bride in Porbander. Perhaps he first became aware of it on the day when he returned from school and his eldest brother's wife looked mischievously at him. In a sense he had always known that he would be married. He had been engaged twice before, and each time his engagement had been broken by the death of his betrothed, but these were matters which concerned the elders, and he had known nothing of the girls or of their deaths. Now, not only would he be married, but so would his brother Karsandas and his cousin who was about the same age as himself.

As the tempo of activities increased, he began to look forward to the bridal procession, to the horse he would mount, to the music-makers and the new life he would lead with a companion all to himself. He did not wonder about her. She had been chosen by his parents and so she would be perfect.

When the time to depart for the marriage arrived, the Rana Sahib would not release Kaba from his duties. In desperation the wedding party left without him. Then the Rana relented and placed his carriage at Kaba's disposal, but Kaba, in his great anxiety to arrive on time, drove the horses carelessly and hard.

The coach toppled and Kaba was injured. The marriage however, had to go on at its divinely appointed time and so Kaba arrived, bandaged but brave, and performed the ritual required of a groom's father.

Mohan, in brocaded tunic and jewelled turban, radiated a new confidence born of the many compliments showered upon him. All his misgivings about his physical appearance fell away. He saw himself tall, strong and handsome.

The bride came to welcome him and though he saw her not for all the flowers and drapes that covered her face, and she saw him not for her downcast eyes, each was impressed with the presence of the other, and each sensed the beginning of a new bond. They followed the drummers and pipers to the wedding canopy and amid the heat and smoke and flames of ghee, exchanged garlands, fed the sacrificial fire and took vow after vow until the assembly was satisfied that the sacraments had been properly taken and their marriage irrevocably sealed.

The elders could not be sure that Mohan knew how to consummate his marriage, so his sister-in-law took him aside and started to counsel him. He was confused and embarrassed, appeared to know and yet not to know, to listen and yet not to listen; so she gave up and commended him to his instincts.

Mohan confronted his bride, embarrassed and nervous by what he had heard. She sat on the bed. All he could see of her were her henna patterned palms, small and helpless in her lap. He picked them up and placed them in his own and was amazed to see how they disappeared. He felt their tremor and his own nervousness was gone. Her eyes were large and when she looked at him he saw a brightness that he had never known before.

He was charged with a sense of intense beauty, and with it there moved in him great waves of passion which he knew only she could still. He reached her easily and marvelled at the great pleasure he felt and wondered whether she felt it too, but was too shy to ask. So he began talking to her, about himself and his family, his school and his studies. He had never talked so much

in so short a time in all his life.

Kastur accepted Mohan as he was given to her. She understood neither his passion nor his great desire to know and talk. She was content to be his wife as she knew she would be even before she had met him, even before she had been told that she would be married.

Now she felt a great tiredness creeping over her and she wanted to sleep but he talked on and on into the night, keeping her awake. Relief came only when his need to talk and assert himself were temporarily satisfied. Then they fell asleep, two children who had suddenly, in some way, become adults.

Mohan became startingly alive to his physical self. Through Kastur he learnt to accept that self and to take pleasure in it. But in the days that followed, the pleasure, and the great desire for that pleasure, evoked in him spasms of aggression and cruelty so that he wished to possess her against her will and to make her into an object of his passions. But Kastur was not easily dominated. Besides, while he was a child of thirteen, loitering with grownup boys, she was a woman who had assumed adult responsibilities and become a junior partner with his mother in running the household.

He was both amazed and disquieted to see how she would be consulted and her advice, at times, actually taken by the elder women. Most disturbing of all was the air of condescension he sensed in her approach to him. If he sought her attention during the day, she would point out to him the many more important duties she had yet to perform. This exasperated and angered him, and made him feel that she did not love him as much as he loved her.

He would wait for her in their room having instructed her to be quick with her chores, but she would attend to these diligently and ignore his impatience. She would chat away gaily with her sisters-in-law, and he would hear her giggle and become furious. He would put out his head to catch her attention but

she would pretend not to see him. By evening his anger would have grown into a cold silence, and he would not speak to her, but Kastur remained unperturbed for she knew that all too soon he would be overpowered by his passion for her and long hours of talking would follow. Mohan would be happy until she would tease him and put out the light and remind him of his fear of the dark. Then he would withdraw from her and his mind would be tortured by the question why he, a man, should be so full of fears, and she, a woman, have none. Why did he fear? What was it that he feared? If there were no ghosts, no thieves, no serpents, would there still be fear?

The torture continued into the day until it became a vague and heavy thing, and he no longer saw what it was that disturbed him. He blamed Kastur, and she, angered by the blame, would refuse to speak to him. He found the wars of silence unbearable but it appeared to him that she thrived on them. He worried about his ability to control a woman, and worried about her capacity to be a good woman. He took his model from the mythologies, and was determined to have nothing less than a Sita for wife. He considered it his duty to make Kastur perfect, and could not understand her resistance to such service.

He bought cheap tracts on love and marriage, but found nothing in them to guide him.

Then he turned to Mehtab, the school's champion athlete, tall, strong and sure of himself. He confided to him his fears of the dark and of other things, and of his wife's fearless nature. Mehtab diagnosed Mohan's problem to be his meatless diet. That, he said, accounted for his weak nature and weak physique and advised that to assert himself in life, he would have to start eating meat. He argued that the conquest of the Hindus by the Muslims and the English had been due to their vegetarianism, and claimed that they had been converted to that diet neither by the scriptures nor their friends, but by enemies who wished to see them permanently enslaved.

The proposal shocked Mohan. He thought of all the vegetarians he knew who were brave and big and completely in command of their wives. But Mehtab assured him that they all ate meat in secret, that even his brother Karsandas ate meat and so did many of the teachers at school whom Mohan revered, and many of the best Vaishnava families in Rajkot. Mohan would not believe him, but when his brother Karsandas admitted to meat-eating, he became depressed, and his faith in his elders and the tradition they had imposed on him, was shaken. Soon thereafter, he began eating meat himself.

They went to the river bank—Mehtab, Mohan and Karsandas. Mehtab brought out the meat and laid it on a cloth. Mohan took his first piece; the contact with his palate revolted him but he told himself that it was not the pleasure he sought, but the pain, so that he would become strong and worthy. So he took another, and another. By the time he had eaten three or four pieces, he was sick and bilious. He could not sleep that night because of the pain and the nightmare. He dreamt that a goat bleated inside his belly, pleading to be released. He jumped up and Kastur saw how the sweat broke out on his brow and body, and she wiped him and soothed him, and he wondered whether it was the meat in him that made her so tender.

More meat feasts followed. Mehtab arranged for Mohan to eat in style, though in secrecy, in one of the more fashionable restaurants. Mohan soon acquired a taste for meat and, after a while, his conscience stopped prodding him, but the fact that he had to deceive his family each time he went to a meat banquet, pained him. Within a year, he had reverted to vegetarianism again. In the meanwhile, his repeated absences roused Kastur's suspicions and she began to express strong disapproval of his friends, particularly of Mehtab.

The months passed by and the time came for Kastur to return to her parents for awhile. As the days drew closer, Mohan suspected that she grew happier and this depressed him. He did

not wish her to go. She was his wife and he should have the power to stop her; yet he could not. He sulked but she ignored him. His mother helped her with the packing. Then the people came from Porbander and she was gone.

He tried to return to his studies but found that he could not concentrate as before, that nothing that had given him pleasure formerly, sufficed now. His cousin, also deprived of his wife, was similarly afflicted and the two boys turned to each other for comfort, and poured abuse on their elders and on the rules that had been imposed upon them. They decided they would do the forbidden. They collected cigarette butts and coughed over them in secret, and took pleasure in looking at each other through smoke-filled eyes. Then, when the butts were exhausted, they picked the pockets of the household servants and bought their own cigarettes; and when even these were exhausted, they went in search of a plant that they had heard could be smoked to give even greater pleasure, and smoked its porous stalks. Then they decided that they would order their elders to summon their wives to return, but when they found that they did not even have the courage to approach their elders, they grew disgusted with themselves and decided to end their lives.

They went to a nearby bush and collected the seeds of the datura for their poison, and in a lonely part of the temple yard offered their oblations to the gods and chanted Mantras. Then they untied the handkerchief which contained the seeds and spread the seeds before them. They looked at them and then at each other. Clasping their hands, they raised veiled eyes heavenward, offering themselves as the sacrifice of adult persecution. They munched the seeds but the taste was so disagreeable that they spat out the cud and looked at each other appealingly. What if they did not die? What if they became permanently crippled? Would their wives love them then? Would they be faithful to them? Overcome by doubts, they withdrew their



offer to the gods.

Mohan again turned to Mehtab to be lifted out of his depression. Mehtab told him that no woman was worth the trouble he was taking over Kastur, that they were all alike, fickle and faithless, and to prove it, took him to a brothel. While Mohan hovered at the door, Mehtab paid the wizened brothel-keeper and pushed Mohan in saying that this was the place where boys and weaklings became men.

Mohan found himself in a small room almost completely filled by the bed on which sat the girl. The henna on her palm was old and faded. She invited him to sit beside her. There was an aroma of beetle-leaf and attar on her person. She was not Kastur; yet he found her attractive and realised that he could do with her as he did with Kastur.

She began caressing him but the movement, unexpected, so frightened him that he froze where he sat on the edge of the bed. She began to jeer at him, and he got up and fled.

The torture of the separation passed. Kastur returned and to his pleasure, he discovered that she too had missed him. The first few days were idyllic but the days that followed were as they had been before. The suspicion Mehtab had sown worked its mischief and he watched his wife with the frenzy of a neurotic husband, and to her great pain, falsely accused her of infidelity.

His friendship with Mehtab continued. The parties they now organised became more sumptuous and the Gandhi boys, embarrassed by their inability to pay the accounts, began borrowing. Karsandas ran up a sizeable debt and Mohan solved the problem by selling a piece of gold from his bangle.

But then his conscience overtook him and he became obsessed by the need to expurgate his sin. He confessed to Kastur, and to his mother who told him that there could be no peace until he had confessed to his father. He approached Kaba, bed-ridden at the time, his long thin body lying on a wooden board as his ailment was such that he could not bear softness beneath

him. His eyes were closed and the pleasure he felt with Mohan was evident in his voice as he said, 'Manu'. Though the illness and age had introduced a certain tenderness to his nature, the authority of the patriarch was still there, and when aroused, he would beat his forehead and raise his voice in words that were more shattering than blows. Mohan therefore did not have the courage to make his confession verbally, so he handed him a note.

Kaba raised himself on the bed to read it, and when the reading had ended, closed his eyes holding the letter loosely in his hand. Then he tore up the letter and pressed the pieces into a tight ball, holding them in his fist. He lowered his body so that he lay prostrate again, and gazed at the ceiling. Then his eyes softened and Mohan saw the tears trickle into the creases of his cheek; and experiencing at once, both his father's agony and compassion, broke into a spasm of weeping.

When Mohan and Kastur turned sixteen, they realized that they were to become parents, but the family's concern over this event was shadowed by a serious deterioration in Kaba's health. Ayurvedic physicians, hakims and doctors had tried their respective treatments. An operation was recommended; the family decided against it, and instead took turns to nurse the old patriarch.

Mohan gave as much time as he could, but his impatience to join Kastur in the evenings marred his devotion. He had no concept of death and the idea that his father might be dying never entered his mind. He had with alacrity, handed over the nursing to his uncle on the fatal night and joined Kastur, but no sooner had he entered their room, than there had been a knocking on the door: his father had died. His sense of remorse was overwhelming and when their child was born, premature and dead, he saw it as retribution for filial failing. Yet it was not long before Kastur was pregnant again.

Mohan turned to his studies. Though he found the work

difficult he persevered and obtained good results. For the first time in his life, he travelled alone when he went to Ahmedabad to write his matriculation. He passed. At about the same time their eldest son Harilal was born. They were then eighteen years old.

While Kastur remained with his mother, and his brothers provided for the family, Mohan enrolled at the Samaldas College in Bhavnagar. The first term ended, leaving him no wiser for he had neither understood the lectures nor adjusted himself to college life. He returned to his family and worried about the new term, but the family guide, Joshiji, came to his rescue.

Kaba's death had left the family impoverished. Mohan's eldest brother Lakshmidas, had not succeeded to his father's influential post, and Joshiji now counselled that in the new and changed situation education was vital to success. Only Mohan could hope to succeed his father, he reasoned; and that too, only if his educational qualifications were sufficiently impressive. To make them so, he should be sent to London. This idea appealed to Mohan. Joshiji was persistent and Mohan, determined; so his mother sent him off to Porbander to consult his uncle, secretly hoping that he would oppose the idea. But the uncle did not wish to bear any such responsibility, and after declaring himself strongly opposed to the obnoxious un-Hindu ways of London-returned gentlemen, stated that the decision must lie with his mother.

Putlibai's last resistance was broken, and when a Jain monk administered to Mohan the three vows of abstinence—from wine, women and meat, Mohan sold Kastur's jewellery, his brother raised a loan, Putlibai tied a string of sacred Tulsi beads around his neck, the women together prepared a parcel of sweets and savouries, and Mohan eager though tearful, left for Bombay to board the ship that would take him to London.

The news of his departure spread quickly among the dis-

persed members of his caste, the Modh Bania. A deputation of elders met him at Bombay and tried to dissuade him from a journey that would defile his soul and expose it to eternal damnation, but Mohan spurned their concern and left them with no option but to declare him an out-caste and place him beyond the pale of their society.

Mohan equipped himself with a wardrobe of English clothes, and set sail for England. His cabin mate, a fellow Indian, was full of concern and advice, but Mohan was shy, dubious about his English, unfamiliar with the menu and unaccustomed to using knives and forks. So he spent most of his time in his cabin and sustained himself on the food his family had given him.

Chapter 3

A Young Kathiawadi in London



London was in the throes of winter. Mohan had planned to storm it in a special white flannel suit he had reserved for the occasion. He emerged from his cabin feeling particularly impressive, but when he saw that he was the only one so dressed, his spirits dropped, and he slunk out of the docks as quickly as he could. He booked in at the Victoria but booked out of it within three days when he discovered that it was one of the most expensive hotels in London.

He sought out the friends to whom he had letters of introduction. They were sympathetic when they observed that he was already homesick, but they were irritated by his awkward parochial mannerisms and his tendency to be over-familiar. They rebuked him sharply when he asked inquisitive questions and touched their possessions. Lonely, disillusioned, depressed, and intensely unhappy, he broke down in the privacy of his room and wept.

But the mood passed quickly and a firm determination to succeed took its place. He set about being an English gentleman. He found that the clothes bought in Bombay were unfashionable and he replaced them with new ones. He had a suit tailored in Bond Street for ten pounds and bought a chimney pot hat. His hair was rough and thick and it embarrassed him that it sprung up like porcupine quills each time he raised his hat in greeting; so he spent long hours before the mirror grooming it. He secured a handsome timepiece on a double gold chain to his waist pocket, took lessons in music, dancing and elocution, and reasonably "civilized", began making the social rounds.

Women found him attractive. There was a dash about him as he lifted his hat, adjusted his hair with a carefully studied gesture of the fingers, and made his bow. He enjoyed their company, escorting them to dinner, to the theatre, or accompanying them on gambols into the country. But there were always the silent reminders; Kastur lurking in the shadows, and more forboding, his pledge to his mother; and these came down

like a sharp wedge whenever he sensed himself attracted beyond bounds.

At Portsmouth the evening was long, and the young girl at the inn, pretty, plump and generous with her favours. He could not resist her, and she neither expected nor wanted him to do so. And yet when they appeared to be drawing close, he suddenly tore himself away, and was gone. How could she understand him? So gentle, and yet so incisively cruel. In London he appeared as the perfect suitor for his elderly friend's young charge, so she plotted and planned a match. The young man came and came again and it seemed an engagement was nigh. The young girl's cheek blossomed and there was a new brightness in her eye. Then the young man grew pale. He suddenly realised what was in the two ladies' minds and he panicked because they did not know that he was already married, and a father. He had deceived them, and yet how could he, so young by their standards, have volunteered such information? Pressed by his predicament, he made a full confession. The initial disappointment soon gave way to curiosity in the customs of an alien culture, and the friendship continued.

London liberated him. It quickened his intellect and challenged his mind. Mohan felt free to admit and absorb ideas that in Rajkot would have been considered altogether taboo. He subscribed to three daily papers: he had never known a daily paper before. He began to read books on religion, vegetarianism, law, and anything that struck his fancy; and he began to discuss the undiscussable — God, vegetarianism. He had not concerned himself overmuch with God and religion before, fearful that too much probing might lead him to atheism. Now he met the Theosophists and became a regular guest at Annie Besant's and Madame Blavatsky's, and God took on a new, rational, acceptable dimension. Religion became a compendium of writings — Christian, Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu — and he began collecting and reading them all.

He discovered vegetarian restaurants and with them a volume of vegetarian literature and a host of vegetarian friends. He found to his delight that far from being a fad, vegetarianism was a whole approach to health and he began experimenting with vegetarian diets. He founded a vegetarian society and became its secretary, inviting two of the best known exponents of the cult to be president and vice-president, and thereby made his debut in public organization.

Then he went to Paris. He lunched in the Eiffel Tower, and marvelled at its construction but was left cold by its architecture. Notre Dame moved him and for the first time in his life he found that an icon could inspire a sense of divinity.

Yet despite his apparent indulgences in non-academic pursuits, he budgeted carefully and learnt to economise without displaying any outward loss in the comfortable standard he had made his own. His studies did not suffer either. Finding that the law exam required very little of his time, he enrolled for the London Matric and chose to study subjects that he had not studied before. He became proficient in French and was able to read Roman Law in Latin. He enjoyed the sessions at the Inn, but found the tradition of having to eat dinners in order to become a barrister, amusing and useless. He took some pleasure in the fact that his fellow students vied with each other to share his table since they could then drink the wines allotted to him.

But for all his debonair and intellectual pursuits, he was almost neurotic in his shyness and became tongue-tied in strange company and helplessly flustered when required to make a speech.

His three years in London came to an end all too soon. He passed his law exam, and soon thereafter left for home. The year was 1899 and he had turned twenty-one. London had taken him and moulded him, and for all his later rejection of her material culture, he would never be able to shake off her impact.

He had loved London and through her had absorbed a deep respect for things British — British law, British justice, British hygiene, British humanitarianism — though he would go down in history as the greatest opponent of British colonialism.

He arrived in Bombay and was met by his brother Lakshmidas, and his first questions were about his mother. He felt himself suddenly overwhelmed by his love for her and he experienced a tremendous desire to tell her this; he had never done so before. Lakshmidas was hesitant, and there were tears in his eyes. He told him that their mother was dead, that she had died soon after receiving the news that he had been called to the bar, but they had not informed him for fear that he might find the grief too much to bear in a foreign country among strangers. Mohan felt weak and empty. His grief was greater than when his father had died, yet he retained an outward calm, for in many ways he had become English.

Lakshmidas had prepared the ground for what he had hoped would be a flourishing practice. But first he guided Mohan through the ritual that would placate the caste and make him somewhat acceptable to it.

Back in Rajkot the family came to meet him and the many cousins and nephews crowded around him with wide-eyed admiration. He found Kastur to be more beautiful than he had remembered and he became once again possessed by his customary desire for her and marvelled that he had been able to bear the parting. His son watched him from a distance and disappeared into his mother's drapes as his father tried to touch and fondle him, and he wondered that it was his son at all.

Mohan set up his practice in Bombay, but his scruples about paying touts, his complete ignorance of legal practice, and his intense nervousness marked him as an instant failure. He became paralysed when he rose to address the court in his first case. Painfully embarrassed, he returned his client's fees and fled, convinced that he would never return again. But the large

family had to be maintained, and the debts incurred, paid. He applied for a post as a school teacher and was rejected because he did not have a university degree. In despair, leaning on his brother's influence, he set himself up in Rajkot where he was assured of some work drawing up memorials. But he did not like the petty intrigues of the small, insecure State and it was only the children, his own and his brother's and the embryo of a new understanding with his wife that made life tolerable. He was bent on "reforming" his family and he had Kastur's co-operation in this. He revised the family diet and introduced some English foods, and he put the children through a routine of exercises each morning. Yet life outside the family continued to revolt him so much, that when a fellow Porbanderian offered him work in the colony of Natal for a year at a fee of R210, with return fare, board and lodging, he took it eagerly and left Rajkot.

Chapter 4

An Indian Lawyer for Southern Africa



When Mohan reached Durban in 1898, he was 24 years old. Seth Dada Abdulla, his host, client and employer, met him at the docks. The elegance of the young gentleman put him off considerably and he secretly wondered what he would do with him.

Mohan had expected to find the same reception in Durban as in England since Natal was a British colony. He was thus shocked when he observed the supercilious air of the petty officials towards the Seth, whom he knew to be one of the wealthiest men in the colony. Customs formalities completed, they entered the city. Mohan had the feeling of being pursued by a silent hostility. The silence broke when he entered the local court. The presiding magistrate ordered Mohan to take off his turban. Mohan was shocked. A turban was not a hat; it covered the head as a mark of personal prestige and public respect. Humiliated and angry, the two men hurried out of the room, and it was then that Mohan learnt of White prejudices.

He wondered whether he should abandon wearing the turban, rather than having it subjected to further insults, but the Seth liked his young charge in a turban. Besides, he argued, never before had so educated an Indian entered the colony, and he reasoned that on that ground alone Mohan should not succumb to the unjustified and humiliating demands of the insensitive Whites. Mohan liked the Seth's attitude, and so he not only retained his turban, but in addition wrote a letter to the daily

paper, protesting against his treatment in court. He thereby, quite unwittingly, stepped into the politics of racial discrimination and released a voice of protest which, in the years to come, would become increasingly more sophisticated. His brush with the colour bar certainly did not end there.

Almost as if by design, Mohan was exposed to a further series of racial assaults within the succeeding few days when he set out for Pretoria to work with Dada Abdulla's lawyers on the Seth's R80,000 claim against his cousin, a Pretoria businessman.

He began the journey in a first class compartment. His companion, preoccupied with his newspaper, remained apparently unaware of his presence until they approached Pietermaritzburg. Then he suddenly balked at the prospect of having to spend the night with a black man, and summoned the officials. They appeared and the chief among them ordered Mohan to the goods van. Mohan refused to obey, whereupon a constable was summoned at Pietermaritzburg and he was pushed out of his compartment and left stranded on the platform while the train moved on.

He sat in the cold on the bench, overcome by his humiliation and barely able to contain his anger. He did not know where his luggage was, and he did not have the courage to enquire lest further humiliation would follow. His first reaction was to flee the country and he debated the matter deep into the night, working out the grounds on which he would ask Dada Abdulla to release him from his contract; but with dawn came a new resolution. To run away would be cowardly. He should stay and fight this thing that made petty officials act in such a high-handed manner towards respected citizens. He realized that what had happened to him was no chance event, but the studied application of an attitude which had taken possession of the local White mind. He considered that attitude evil and contrary to every British tradition he had learned to respect, and hence, in fact, alien to the English who practised it. He decided to stay and fight.

He contacted Dada Abdulla in the morning and both men complained to the Railway Department which apologized and assured them against further incident. But the assurance was worthless. The events that followed may have been expected by the average Indian but for Mohan, they were the trials of a modern Harischandra.

At Charlstown the railway line ended. He prepared to board the coach to Standerton but the Leader told him that his booking had been cancelled. When he saw that the 'Coolie' persisted, he put him on the box next to the driver and he himself went inside the coach. Mohan felt the now familiar fury rising within him again but he checked it, realising that the Leader would be only too ready to dump him. At Paardekop, the Leader wanted to smoke. He emerged from the coach and, spreading a sack on the foot board, said to Mohan, "Sammy, you sit on this. I want to sit next to the driver." This was too much and Mohan could no longer contain himself. His words, however, were stifled by a barrage of blows which nearly knocked him off the coach. He clung desperately to the rails as if to his dignity, determined to stay on. The Leader, almost twice his size, continued to kick viciously and the driver watched with wide-eyed wonder, marvelling at the 'coolie's' strength. The agony might have continued indefinitely had it not been for the intervention of the other passengers who pleaded with the Leader to leave the "poor man" alone.

Mohan continued an uneasy journey in his assigned place next to the driver, accompanied by the threats of the Leader to "fix him" at the next stop.

His trial pursued him to Johannesburg. He missed the friends who had come to receive him, so he hailed a taxi and directed it to the Grand Central Hotel, but when he reached it he was told that it was full. He wondered whether he had not perhaps again been insulted, and his suspicions were confirmed when his friends found him. They laughed with unrestrained amusement



when they heard where he had tried to spend the night. "This country is not for men like you," they said. "Only we can live in it, for in order to make money we are prepared to pocket insults." The statement shocked Mohan and he began to think that perhaps there were two sides to the story, and that the house of his countrymen, too, required being put in order.

The next morning he prepared to leave for Pretoria. He insisted on a first class train reservation. His host told him that Indians did not constitute first class passengers in South Africa and that to avoid further pain to himself, he should be content with the usual Indian third class ticket. But Mohan insisted on his right, and surprised his host when he actually succeeded in making a first class reservation. "But wait till you get on the train. You will surely be thrown out," he was warned and the warning proved correct. The train had hardly moved out of the station when the conductor instructed him to go to the third class compartment. Mohan prepared himself to meet the new assault but found it unnecessary. His fellow traveller insisted that the gentleman be left alone, and the conductor, shrugging his shoulders left them. It made Mohan happy to think that Whites were not all alike.

Dada Abdulla's attorney was to have met him in Pretoria, but since it was a Sunday the gentleman was observing the Sabbath. Mohan was at a loss to know what to do, when a Negro fellow traveller, sensing his predicament, directed him to a hotel owned by his countryman. Mohan went reluctantly, but found to his pleasant surprise that the owner was prepared to accommodate him and even persuaded his other guests to dine with him.

The next day he sought out his Pretoria contacts, and found that they had arranged lodgings for him with a White landlady. Dada Abdulla had taken precautions to shield his charge from the attacks of his adversaries. But Mohan could not be isolated and he set about getting to know the local Indians.

The humiliation of Indians in Kruger's country was unprecedented. They were treated as an unclean species of humanity, segregated into locations, and forbidden to be on the streets at night or to walk on the pavement outside the President's house. Mohan could not understand how his countrymen could tolerate such indignities. "We are prepared to pocket insults in order to make money" ran the refrain like a nightmare through his mind and he wondered whether he should not fly from the country lest he became contaminated by it. He decided to stay, to help, to reform.

He saw the weakness of his people, realised their internal divisions, their petty bickerings, their rigid traditionalism which prevented them from identifying themselves with other South Africans, and he did what he could to change their attitudes. Moved by his new sense of mission, thoughts and words came easily, and he made his first public speech. They were at the house of Haji Mohammed Joosub. He informed the small gathering of the need to project an Indian image which could gain the admiration of the Whites . He advised them to run their business with scrupulous honesty, to maintain a high standard of hygiene, to learn to speak English so that they would be able to communicate with their rulers, and to form an association that would bind them as a single people, undivided by barriers of religion and language. Through such an organization, he explained, they could aspire for equal rights in the country. They listened to him because he went directly to the heart of matters, and because they understood the wisdom of his advice. But there was little that they were prepared to do apart from confessing their errors, and few took advantage of his offer to teach them English.

Yet they found him attractive because of his naiveté, which was as pleasing as a child's, and his eagerness to learn, and his great desire to share whatever he possessed. And they were flattered to have so educated a friend. But when Mohan sought

relaxation, or intellectual or spiritual stimulation, he turned to the few White friends he had made, particularly to the young Quaker, Coates, whom he had met at the prayer meetings of the General Mission Movement. He admired Coates for his integrity and the pains he took to shield him from the colour prejudice of fellow Christians. He enjoyed, too, the company of Mr. Krause, the Attorney General, whom he had first met when he had gone to him to obtain a permit that would exempt him from the curfew regulation. Mr. Krause had been horrified to find that the regulation also applied to a fellow colleague of the Inns of Court. He had written out the exemption, deeply embarrassed, and had then invited him to his home. No doubt his fellow Indians were impressed by this influential friendship and saw "Gandhi bhai" as something of a bridge builder, and this pleased him.

Mohan had declared himself spiritually uncommitted and this led both Christians and Muslims to view him as a prospective convert. His Christian friends in particular brought him many books which he read intensely so that he could discuss them well; and he was in turn stimulated to send for literature on Hinduism. During his short stay in India, he had found a saintly friend in a Bombay merchant, Raichandbhai. He now turned to him for guidance, and so began a valuable correspondence between them.

The wide contact, satisfying friendships and the love and respect he commanded mellowed him so that he did not react with the same intense personal bitterness as before when humiliated on account of his colour. Thus when the constable on duty outside Paul Kruger's house cuffed him without warning because he had dared to cross onto the footpath outside the State House, he refused to lay a charge despite Coate's urging and offer to act as witness, explaining that he was no longer prepared to take up issues on his personal behalf, and that he would do so only on behalf of his community.

It was in Pretoria, too, that he learnt law and began to respect the vocation for which he had trained and with which he had become temporarily disillusioned. It had saddened him to see two cousins locked in battle against each other. He watched with disgust the manner in which the rival lawyers had fanned their animosities. Then when he had despaired, the two men had agreed to his initial suggestion, to resort to arbitration. The judgment had been in Dada Abdulla's favour but the Seth's kindness in victory had revived some of the original friendship between the two families. This gave Mohan a new insight into law, so that he saw the proper function of lawyers as an appeal to the higher natures of men, with the objective of bringing protagonists together; and the proper technique of law to be the presentation of facts, which he saw as truth, so that justice could be done.

The case concluded, and Mohan prepared for home. Seth Abdulla had arranged a day-long reception for him at Sydenham. They spent the time relaxing and lazing in the shade. An item in the paper caught Mohan's attention: a bill had been introduced in the Natal Legislative Assembly which would deprive Indians of their franchise. There were just over a hundred Indian voters at the time. In time to come there would be more. Strengthened by number, they would be able to influence policies and participate in making decisions. Their status would improve and they would eventually command the respect that was their due. But without the franchise, discrimination against them would increase, their rights to property and trade would be restricted, their dignity as a people further emasculated. He shuddered at the vision which rose before him and alerted the others to the impending doom. They had not seen the grim implications. Dada Abdulla explained that they would not even have bothered to enrol as voters had it not been for Mr. Harry Escombe who had canvassed their support. Mohan showed them how they could use the vote to protect and improve their

status, and insisted that they should form a strong organization and fight the Bill. They appeared dubious. They pointed out that they did not understand English, that they were dependent upon White lawyers and that the educated Christian Indians on whom they could have relied, were under the thumb of White missionaries. They pleaded that Mohan should stay and help them fight the Bill. He believed that it was his duty to do so and so postponed his return by a month. The farewell party was converted into a committee meeting.



Chapter 5

An Indian Politician in Natal



The Committee set to work immediately. An urgent telegram was sent to the Speaker of the House asking for a stay in the passing of the Bill relating to Indian franchise. Mohan sat up all night drafting and polishing the memorial to be sent to the Prime Minister, and his friends brought him scribes, ex-indentured Christian clerks to make him the required number of copies. Committee members moved in and out of the temporary office, bringing new recruits and offering new services. Within hours, the excitement of improvised activity had proliferated throughout the community and for the first time merchants and clerks, Bombayees, Madrasies and Calcuttias moved together in a whirlwind of activity. Never before had Mohan felt so exhilarated. Meetings were held every day. More money was collected than actually required and merchants ran around in their carriages canvassing support.

Indians had suddenly arrived on the political scene and the Colony became alive to their demands and their eloquence. Yet Mohan did not see that he had become a politician overnight. He simply felt that he was carrying out his British duty to prevent an un-British Act. The Bill, however, passed the Legislative Assembly and awaited royal assent, but Indian enthusiasm did not flag. Mohan organised another monster petition and consulted every available authority in drawing it up. He sought both to protect Indian rights and to allay White fears, and so argued that although Indians were entitled to the

franchise since they had a form of franchise in India, the number that would qualify was so small that it would not threaten White interests. Within a fortnight 10,000 signatures had been collected and the petition was sent to the Colonial Secretary of State.

The promised month passed and Mohan began to think that he should be leaving for home. But the matter of the Bill remained unresolved and the Committee refused to spare Gandhi Bhai, who had become indispensable. Mohan himself felt that he could not leave, and he reasoned that while he had no attractive prospects to return to in India, he could in Natal, combine service with work and so help his family financially. It would mean further separation from Kastur and the children but this was a sacrifice he was willing to make. So he planned to stay until political affairs appeared better resolved.

The Committee volunteered to pay him a salary, but he would not entertain this, and elected instead to set himself up in legal practice. He applied for membership to the Bar; the Bar Association opposed his application, contending that it had never been intended to admit a Coloured person. But the objection was over-ruled. Mohan was required to conform to the laid down requirements of dress, and so relinquished wearing his turban in court, much to the disappointment of Dada Abdulla.

In 1894, the Ad Hoc Committee was constituted into a permanent organisation under the designation of the Natal Indian Congress. Mohan became its first Secretary. He was ambitious for Congress and saw it as a channel through which an integrated Indian community could attain a comprehensive range of aspirations; cultural, ethical, educational and welfare, and at the same time provide a platform for formal discussion and debate. He formulated its constitution accordingly. Members were taught to observe correct rules of procedure; they addressed each other as "Mr."; were not allowed to smoke during deliberations, and speeches were translated on request.

There were forty on the first committee, and though Muslims predominated, Hindus, Parsees, Christians, North Indians and South Indians were well represented. Yet the high membership fee, three pounds per annum, precluded many from participation; so an auxiliary body, the Indian born Educational Association was formed, and this served the added function of attracting the youth.

Affairs of business settled, Mohan began to establish a home. He rented a house in a select residential area and Dada Abdulla insisted on paying for the handsome pieces of furniture he chose. He was, in a sense, a bachelor and there was the problem of domestic help, but the idea of servants revolted him. So he set up a household of companions and they shared the chores among them. With some exceptions the experiment worked well, and the household with its multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-caste and multi-religious membership was the germ of the Ashrams that would follow. His home became an important social centre. Whites and Indians, Muslims and Christians, and even those professing no religion, were drawn to it, attracted by the provocative discussions, by Mohan's receptivity to their thoughts and his persuasiveness in expressing his own. Despite his youth, his views were exceptionally mature and compelling, and those who associated with him found that they not only became involved in his ideas, but also in the activities that these promoted. So on weekends, they found themselves galvanized into visiting families and advising them on matters of health and hygiene. The colony stimulated him, and he became absorbed in its work and its pleasures and returned to it something of his talents and experiences. He was most relaxed when he withdrew to his cottage on the beach, or when he visited Dada Abdulla or Sohrabjee Rustomjee and became immersed in familiar family surroundings.

His interest in religion continued, but it was clear that he was not a recruit for any doctrinaire system, for he looked for

universals, declaring that all religions reflected the same fundamental truths. He represented the Esoteric Christian Union and the London Vegetarian Society, and notices appeared under his name in the papers on behalf of both organizations—advertising books, and calling on members of the public to come and discuss issues with him. His circle of friends was wide, and he often spent Sundays with White Christians who invited him to dinner and to attend church with them.

But if he attracted people he also antagonised them when his own strong views ran counter to their beliefs. So he horrified and lost Christian friends by his insistence that Christ was no greater than Buddha. There was also an occasion on which a White matron who had welcomed him to her dinner table on the Sabbath felt constrained to ask him to break off his visits because her young son, influenced by Mohan's example, had begun to refuse meat.

And always there was the responsibility of Congress. The organization had to be built, its work expanded, its influence propagated in India and in Britain. Members had to be stimulated into an intelligent involvement with local and international problems, and motivated to take appropriate and timely action. Money had to be found for publications. His first pamphlet, "The Indian Franchise—An Appeal to Every Briton", received a good press, but he realised that for effective and continuous publicity, an Indian paper was necessary, and he began investigating possibilities.

Mohan realised that personal approaches would have to be made if the Organization was to be extended and become representative of Indian thought throughout the colony. So he organized drives for canvassing members and funds. They would go out in carriages, travelling through tortuous dust tracks, over hills and across valleys to reach the storekeepers in solitary trade on the North and South Coasts and in the interior. Salaams were exchanged, hospitality accepted, and long patient haggles

would continue over donations and policies. Sometimes a man would be so enthusiastic that he would drop his duties and accompany them to the next outpost, joining his influence to theirs in gaining members. But almost as often, there was a reluctant one, happy to fête them, but stubbornly resisting their mission. They would persuade, cajole, appeal, and play on his religious and patriotic sentiments, and they would never accept “no” for an answer. They would retire for the evening and continue discussions in the morning. Hours would pass. Mohan would grow tired and turn his attention to the customers as they came up from the valleys—a Zulu woman, her ebony breasts lit up by the sun, her little boy in a kilt of beads. But if he flagged, the others persisted; and when they flagged, he pursued and so they never lost a member. Generally they found such trips exhilarating though physically tiring, for it brought them closer to other areas and they enjoyed the companionship of one another and of the people they met.

For a while Mohan worked almost entirely among merchants and Free Indians and had little awareness of his indentured countrymen. Then one day, Balasundram, a Tamil labourer, stood before him—bedraggled, broken-toothed and bleeding; and the barrier was broken. He had been flogged by his master. Mohan could hardly bear to see his agony. The fact that he had taken off his turban in European deference to the “Sahib”, and it hung a ragged strip in his hand, increased his distress. He asked him to wind his turban on, took him to a doctor, and then to a magistrate. Balasundram’s wrongs were righted and the cane-fields became aware of an Indian lawyer who would protect workers and not charge for such protection.

Congress as a whole became interested in the plight of the indentured workers and it agitated effectively when an annual tax of twenty pounds was suggested on all indentured Indians of twelve years and over who failed to reindenture their labour or to return to India. The tax which became law was reduced to



three pounds, which was still highly exorbitant and flagrantly unjust, since average Indian wages at that time were about 15 shillings a month.

Two years passed; the colony had grown into him and he had become an indispensable portion of it; so he took leave of his Executive to return to India and fetch his family, and at the same time gain support for the Congress cause.



Chapter 6

Advocate of the South African Indian Cause



Mohan set sail for India on a warm and sunny day. There were not many people on board, and the few in the upper class quickly struck up the kind of friendship characteristic of people thrown together for a short period—intense while it lasts, but brief. His constant companions were two Englishmen and the Captain, a Plymouth Brother. They played chess, studied Urdu with the help of a munshi travelling by deck, and talked. When left on his own, Mohan taught himself Tamil through a “self-teacher” and worked on a pamphlet on the status of Indians in Southern Africa.

The twenty-four days passed quickly. The ship docked at Calcutta. Mohan took a train to Bombay but lost it at Allahabad during a forty-five minute stop. He had alighted to make a purchase from a chemist but the chemist, asleep on his arrival, had dawdled and he had reached the station in time to see the train chugging off, and the station master carefully putting aside his luggage. Mohan, stranded in Allahabad, used his time fruitfully, establishing contact with the editor of the “Pioneer” in order to promote his South African cause.

By the time he reached Bombay he found himself so overcome by thoughts of his family that he left immediately for Rajkot. Harilal was seven and he had hardly spent a year of his life with him, and he did not even know Manilal, already three.

But concern for his family was quickly obscured by his passion for duty. If Kastur and the boys had entertained hopes of enjoy-

ing his companionship, these were quickly dashed. The boys had not even overcome their shyness and Kastur had barely exhausted her questions about Natal, when his mind turned to weightier matters. First there was the printing of the pamphlet; that over, he assembled the children of the neighbourhood and with promises of old stamps and his blessings, inveigled them into helping him with distribution. Then, learning of a threatened outbreak of plague, he joined the local committee on a health and hygiene campaign. Finally he was off on his great Indian campaign to win support for the South African Indian cause, canvassing newspaper editors, and leaders such as Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Gokhale and Tilak; and addressing meetings in Bombay, Poona and Madras.

He marvelled at the ease with which doors flew open and assistance came, and it made him wonder about the nature of the Ultimate Cause that prompted him and guided others to respond to him.

He had only been away a few months when he received a telegram requesting his urgent return to Natal. Feelings against Indians had reached paranoic proportions in the Colony, following an application by the Tongaat Sugar Company for eleven indentured Indian artisans. Mass meetings were being held in Durban and Pietermaritzburg and anonymous poison pen letters were appearing in the daily papers, claiming that there was an Indian conspiracy to flood the country with cheap labour. The Congress Executive did not know how to handle the situation and its Secretary's presence was imperative. Dada Abdulla had reserved free passages for "Ghandhi Bhai" and his family in his new ship, the Courland, due to leave shortly on her maiden voyage.

Mohan prepared to leave for South Africa. Up to now, only he had represented his people abroad. Now his family would be joint ambassadors with him. He knew that while the family of an Indian could remain secret and never appear in the fore-

ground either to disturb or to support the image he projected, the European tradition was different. The family was constantly on display, certainly on all important occasions, and the family was a vital measure of a man's status. He was determined to adopt European living standards in South Africa and his family now created a problem. Kastur had spent her life between his home and her parents', between Probandar and Rajkot. He had made some attempts, without success, at educating and Westernising her, but now he planned a revolution. He toyed with the idea of putting his family into European clothes but the idea of Kastur in long skirts and quaint hats was distasteful to him. Besides he knew that such apparel might very well upset the sensitivities of Indians in Natal who secluded their women and retained the orthodoxies of "home". So he settled on the Parsi mode of dress, which was considered at the time to be the most fashionable in India. He began, in addition, to teach them European table manners. The children who included Gokul, his widowed sister's son, a year older than Harilal, had their feet squeezed into hot socks and tight shoes. They complained, but though the tears ran down their cheeks "Bapu" remained adamant.

Dada Abdulla's two ships, the "Naderi" and the "Courland", travelled together carrying 600 passengers between them. Four days from Durban, they encountered a violent storm and the distraught passengers prayed and screamed while Mohan helped the crew to comfort them. The storm passed and the ships reached Durban on December 18th, 1896, to face a far more formidable storm, of human passion. Bombay was declared a prohibited port and the ships were promptly placed under quarantine.

Mohan had had no conception of the hatred that had been aroused against Indians in his absence and he was appalled by what he found. Unscrupulous politicians, among them a butcher, a lawyer and a doctor, had fanned emotions to a

feverish pitch. They had made capital of a Reuter Report that had misrepresented Mohan's Indian pamphlet as an accusation against Whites of assault and robbery. The numbers on the ships had been inflated to 800 and rumour, completely unfounded, was rife that among them were 50 blacksmiths and 30 carpenters who would replace White artisans with their cheap labour. In fact, of the total number of passengers, only 60 were immigrants to Natal, the rest being families of old settlers, while over two-thirds were bound for Delagoa Bay, Mauritius, Madagascar and the Transvaal. But this was ignored.

Instead, a notice appeared in the daily papers under the signature of the captain of the Natal Mounted Rifles of the Volunteer Force, calling on "every man in Durban to attend a public meeting for the purpose of arranging a demonstration to proceed to the Point and protest against the landing of Asiatics". At the meeting, passions were inflamed and the wildest and most libellous statements were made about Mohan who was accused of leading the "Asiatic invasion". A resolution was unanimously passed to assist the Government, if necessary by force, to return 'Gandhi' and his shipload of 'coolies' to India. "If the Government does nothing", the meeting declared, "Durban will go to the Point and do it herself". The Attorney General and Defence Minister, Mr. Harry Escombe assured "Durban" that the Government would at least take no action against any demonstrations the meeting contemplated.

Mohan's fellow travellers turned to him, bemused and shocked, not quite comprehending the full import of the situation on shore. Mohan, kept informed by Dada Abdulla, explained the position as best he could, impressing on them that the demonstration was a test of patience, that they were innocent, their cause just and that they would be vindicated if they refused to be intimidated and insisted on their right to land. They listened and took heart.

The Medical Officer had placed the ships under quarantine for

five days to make up the required twenty-three days from the time of the departure of the ships from Bombay. This did not give sufficient time to contend with the political ramifications of the protest, so a new Medical Officer was appointed, who declared another twelve days of quarantine from the date of fumigation; but fumigation did not begin until the sixth day and so the agony of the passengers was increased for a further eighteen days.

Mohan wondered how much longer the passengers' patience would last. There was a tragic stillness on board, and within him, silent revolution. The unscrupulous fanning of emotions, the hysteria of the mob, and worst of all, the support that a British Colonial Government had given to a bunch of hooligans disgusted him and shook his confidence in a tradition he had come to love and respect.

On Christmas day, the captain organised a party and invited Mohan to speak. He found he could not produce the expected light-hearted banalities. There was too great a ferment within him. So he spoke of his disillusion with Western civilisation and with great sadness declared that it fostered a monstrous aggression that destroyed all those whom it touched. The captain and his mates were upset, and they openly sneered that Mohan would react with equal aggression when the gang on shore got stuck into him.

Five more days passed before the period of quarantine was over. The two ships were allowed to dock and no legal barrier prevented the passengers from alighting but at the dock was "Durban"—a seething rabble of White storekeepers, artisans and their Zulu assistants, armed with an assortment of weapons. They threatened to push into the sea any Indian who dared disembark. Watching from a distance were a few of the braver friends of the passengers. Close to the rabble were some of their White friends holding a watching brief, prominent among them Mr. Laughton, Dada Abdulla's counsel, and a close friend of

Mohan.

A reporter from the *Natal Advertiser* climbed the gangway. "Mr. Gandhi" was the man of the moment and he meant to get a scoop. "How do you view the proceeding of the demonstration?" Mohan sighed inwardly. After 26 days of quarantine, the show of hate and threats of violence, what did the man expect? He saw his fellow passengers preparing to disembark despite the ear-shattering and nerve-wracking threats of the mob below and he was calmed by their courage. He realised that the reporter could be an agent of goodwill between Indians and Whites, so he chose his words carefully and spoke with impressive restraint. He considered the demonstration "ill-advised", he said, and had not expected the situation to go "so far". He was surprised by the behaviour "especially proceeding from a number of colonists who say they are loyal to the British crown, . . . "it seemed a sort of Leonine partnership"; "they wished to gain all the advantages possible from the Indians, but did not want the Indians to have any advantages whatsoever." The reporter wrote rapidly. "Was it probable," he asked that if free Indians were stopped, the Indian Government would stop indentured Indians?" Mohan replied that he hoped it would. He pointed out that the demonstration threatened the harmony of the Empire and the goodwill of India, "the brightest jewel in the Empire", and pleaded for greater tolerance, stating that if Indians appeared uncivilized in some respects, the solution did not lie in rejecting them, but in teaching them correct behaviour. The reporter asked about the notorious 'green pamphlet', and Mohan explained that the subject of the pamphlet was not the ill treatment of Indians in South Africa but their legal disabilities.

"I have said in the pamphlet that Indians are the most hated beings in South Africa, and that they are being ill-treated, but for all that we do not ask the Government for redress with regard to these things, but with regard to legal disabilities that are placed upon them."

There was an audible quietening in the excitement on the docks. Mr. Harry Escombe had arrived. He now reasoned with the reluctant rabble, promising it everything it wished against the Indians, if only it would disperse. Laws would be introduced to control their immigration and steps would be taken to curb their trading activities. He complimented the demonstrators on the effective manner in which they had made their point, but declared that it was now time for them to go home and leave the matter in the hands of the Government. The rabble began to disperse and in a short while the dock resumed its normal air of week-day activity. Passengers began to disembark and relations and friends arrived in small batches to receive and comfort them.

Mohan cast a last critical eye over Kastur and the children, and satisfied with their appearance, began to help with the luggage. They were almost at the gangway when they were intercepted by a messenger, sent urgently by Sir Harry Escombe. If "Mr. Gandhi" valued his safety, he would be well advised not to leave the ship now, but wait until it was dark when the Superintendent of the Water Police would escort him. Kastur's agitation was obvious though she did not understand a word of the conversation. Mohan thanked the messenger and explained the position to Kastur. He proposed that she and the children should go with Sohrabji Seth who had come to receive them, and wait for him at his home. He would join them in the evening. Kastur was on the verge of tears as she begged to be allowed to remain with him, but he was impatient and she found herself pushed onto the gangplank with no alternative but to hold on to little Manilal's hand, and descend. The older boys followed her.

Dada Abdulla missed Mohan. Sohrabji Seth told him of the Attorney General's message and he was infuriated by Mohan's decision to abide by it. "The brother-in-law of a crook!" he fumed and sent Mr. Laughton off to tell Mohan to exercise his right as a passenger and disembark with dignity rather than creep into the city like a thief at night. Mr. Laughton not only

communicated the message but scolded Mohan for having faith in the Attorney General. "I know what has been going on there below — the plotting and scheming," he said. Mohan readily agreed to accompany him into town and the two men left together.

With the dock area behind them, they entered an adjacent street when suddenly shouting broke out. People lurking around a corner, apparently waiting for this very moment, raised the alarm. A hostile crowd quickly gathered. Laughton and Mohan were separated and Mohan assaulted. A stone grazed his ear, a rotten egg splattered across his face, a barrage of cuffs and kicks assailed his body. His turban was knocked off his head and he felt himself falling, fainting. He hung on to the railings of a house and waited, helpless against the blows he expected to follow. Instead there was the touch and strength of a gentle hand and the firm voice of a woman remonstrating on his behalf. The lady helped him up and, shielding him with her umbrella, led him away. He recognised her as the wife of the police superintendent, Alexander, and when he regained his breath he began to thank her, but she would not let him speak and continued to vent her anger at the "shameless hooligans". They reached the police station and Mr. Alexander offered him refuge, but Mohan did not wish to impose any further upon their kindness. Besides, he was in need of medical attention, and he knew that his family would be worried. Mr. Alexander, in the face of such argument, could do no more than offer him an escort to the Rustomji's, but he feared for his safety.

Mohan's arrival at the Rustomji home, brimming with members of the Congress Executive and other friends, was heralded with thanksgiving and relief. The ship's doctor attended to his bruises, and his host bustled around ordering refreshments. They were just beginning to feel safe when some children came running in, and in excited voices, warned them of "hordes of Whites" coming towards the house. Mohan was at



the door, but his friends held him back. He had suffered enough. They began barricading the entrances to the house. One of them slipped through a back entrance to alert the police.

Mr. Alexander came immediately, with a good show of strength. He found a large White mob outside the house crying out for "Gandhi". He tried to reason with it, but his voice was drowned by the shouting, so he pretended to be part of the mob and began to lead it in song in a rich sonorous voice, "hang old Gandhi on the sour apple tree," and they joined him lustily. In the meanwhile, one of his men stole into the house with an extra uniform and almost as quickly he emerged, accompanied by a second constable — and Mohan was whisked away to safety.

When the singing had been done, Mr. Alexander told the mob that Gandhi was not in the house, and when it would not believe him, asked it to send representatives to carry out a search, which it did. Tired and disappointed at not finding its quarry the mob dispersed and Natal's feeling against Indians abated for a while.

The matter of Mohan's assault remained to be settled. The Secretary of State for the Colonies in England cabled the Government of Natal instructing it to prosecute his assailants. The Attorney General had no option but to comply. He called Mohan to his office and asked whether he would be able to identify his assailants. Mohan said that he would be able to identify some of them but felt that there was no point in prosecuting them since they were merely pawns in the hands of their instigators. "If anyone is to blame", he told the Attorney General, "it is the Committee of Europeans, you yourself, and therefore, the Government of Natal. Reuter might have cabled a distorted account. But when you knew that I was coming to Natal it was your duty and the duty of your Committee to question me about the suspicions you entertained with regard to my activities in India, to hear what I had to say and then do

what might appear proper in the circumstances. Now I cannot prosecute you or the Committee, and even if I could, I would not seek redress in a court of law. Your action was political, to safeguard what you considered to be in the interest of the Europeans. I too will fight you politically, and through political means, endeavour to prove you and the other Europeans wrong.”

The Attorney General for once found himself speechless in the presence of a Non-white. He found Mohan's tone and sentiments extraordinary. He had been warned against the coolie's shrewdness. Instead he found him to be frank and in a sense, even Christian. He did not know what to make of him. The man held the trump card, and yet would not play to win. He was noticeably relieved and he told Mohan so, pointing out that while the Government, without contrary instruction from him, was obliged to prosecute, it could have done so only at the risk of unleashing a great storm. He thanked Mohan and bowed him out and then sank into his deep chair, trying to unravel the mystique of the little man.

Mohan's prestige rose tremendously, especially following the publication of the interview in the *Advertiser*. The behaviour of the mob was openly criticised and his own attitude to it, praised highly. Mohan was quoted as having said, “I do not return with the intention of making money, but of acting as a humble interpreter between the two communities. I shall endeavour to fulfill the office of interpreter so long as both the communities do not object to my presence.”

But Mohan's attitude to the culture of the west underwent a drastic change. Previously he had tended to consider practically everything western as superior and good; now he subjected it to careful scrutiny, beginning to view it as a system of superficial material forms, incapable of developing and sustaining a moral civilization.

Chapter 7

A Family in Durban



The Gandhis settled down to what Kastur hoped would be a quiet family life, but she soon found that this was impossible with Mohan and so there was open conflict between them, and a silent suffering in the children.

Kastur had had no idea of the magnitude of Mohan's commitment to the "public" cause and she was overwhelmed by what she discovered. The "cause" became all the more difficult to contend with because of its strange mixing with religion. She understood religion as she had been taught it and, as the people of her family, and of her husband's family had observed it, but Mohan's ideas about religion were not these. To her mind his ideas were clearly irreligious and he brought these into her house so that they intruded into her daily life and defiled it in a manner intolerable to her. He repudiated the caste-bound life of a Vaishnava and replaced it with a strange intermingling in which "God-decreed" barriers fell away, forcing her to associate with people who understood neither her ritual nor her language and were not of her caste. She protested vehemently and accused him of imposing upon her a code of behaviour that desecrated their tradition. He reacted by asking her to leave him.

Often their voices would be raised in argument and there were times when Mohan would come close to using violence on her. On one occasion she roused him to such an extent that he dragged her to the gate and threatened to throw her out of his house. She pleaded that he should restrain himself, complained

that the neighbours could hear their quarrelling and that she was alone and helpless in a foreign country with no place to go. Then he was moved to shame and repentance and wondered what evil lay in their relation that it should thus bring out the worst in him.

He did not enjoy his children as he enjoyed other children. He was too much burdened by his responsibilities to them, and so concerned about making them perfect that he could not tolerate their weaknesses. The boys wanted him to be just a father to them, but he insisted on being both father and teacher, and in the process failed to be adequate in either. He did not like the Indian schools in Natal and refused to use his privileged position to obtain accommodation for them in any White schools. So he supervised their education at home and engaged a governess to assist him, but his attendance as teacher was as erratic as his attendance as father, and their education suffered.

A year passed. Kastur was pregnant. He had not concerned himself with her other pregnancies, and had left the women of the house to attend to her in the traditional way, but now he took a personal interest in Kastur's health and arranged for the best medical care. He also studied an Indian text book on gynaecology and prepared to attend to the delivery himself if necessary. He did not have to use his newly acquired knowledge however, for their third son, whom they named Ramdas, was born at a convenient hour.

Two years later, their fourth and last son, Devadas, was born; this time Mohan was the midwife. Kastur had never known a gentler nurse; he was tender with her as he had been with his sister's husband whom he had nursed during his short stay in India. It was as if he atoned for having failed to nurse his father — as if through nursing he fulfilled his overwhelming desire to serve man, as Sharawan Kumar had served his parents.

He loved to practice medicine. When the time had come for him to choose a profession, he had expressed the desire to be a

doctor rather than a lawyer, but in deference to his father's objections to the practice of vivisection, he had chosen law. From gynaecology he now turned to reading general medicine. The body, its chemistry and dietary needs fascinated him. Theoretical understanding was insufficient: he was overpowered by a need to see ideas in action. Just as he sought to implement moral teaching, he now sought to practise medicine and began experimenting with an old Indian medical science based on the use of natural remedies. He treated and nursed members of his own family and was excited by the results.

He nursed the beggars and lepers who came to his door. He invited them to his table and shared his supper with them, but he was smitten with a deep sense of inadequacy when he realised that he was not prepared to share his whole life with them, as he was with people of his own social standing. He was inhibited, he felt, by some defect in his nature, and the spectre of those who had less than he, haunted him; and he began to question his moral right to his high standard of living. He began to shed comforts. His laundryman was the first to go, but his dismissal too brought him little solace, for he began to suspect his motive. Was it because the laundryman had failed to keep him in daily supply with crisp white shirts despite his large wardrobe? Next, he dispensed with the barber. His appearance at court, in a ragged crop of hair amused his colleagues, but he laughed it away, and joked that the White barber had refused to attend to him.

He derived some comfort on the mornings when he helped the Anglican minister, Dr. Booth, to minister to the sick, before turning to the business of law and politics. He could afford the time because young R. K. Khan had joined him and young Khan was efficient. Later young Khan amassed a large fortune and at his death, left it all to medical services.

The work of the Congress continued, but the work became more difficult and the results more futile when Natal was

granted Responsible Government. Within months four anti-Asiatic Bills were introduced, throwing Mohan and the Executive into a rush of activities — drawing up and submitting petitions, canvassing signatures, winning support — all to little purpose, for the Bills became law. The Indians lost their franchise; prejudice against them mounted and they were no longer free to enter into the colony except as indentured workers. Some blamed the Congress and its agitation for this deterioration. To them Mohan's answer was that they spoke from ignorance, that if the Natal Indian Congress had not stemmed the tide of anti-Indianism to the extent that it had, Indians would have lost all in Natal, as they had in the Orange Free State.

There was also the pleasant side of political life — the friendships it gave rise to and the opportunities it provided for meeting foreign correspondents and members of the British Parliament. Dinners would be arranged, visiting dignitaries would be entertained and the Congress hall itself, often the venue of happy and memorable events, would be decorated with lights and buntings, to mark the birth of a son to an executive member, to commemorate the opening of a library, or to enjoy a dramatic performance of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves". One such occasion was arranged to inspect the Community's Silver Jubilee presentation to her Majesty — a heart-shaped silver plate mounted on Natal yellow wood.

Congress grew strong. The Secretary was firm; sometimes members found him dogmatic, stubborn and dictatorial, but at all times they were convinced that he was more right than they could ever be. Above all they could match neither his expertise nor his capacity for work and so they gave him full rein. He purchased a property on behalf of the Organization which assumed the additional role of landlord.

But neither public interest in Congress nor Mohan's personal popularity remained constant. In 1899 the Secretary reported:

“The fiery enthusiasm seems to have died out. Congress has to discharge a liability of three hundred pounds, probably four hundred pounds, and it is difficult to say how the monies are to be brought in.”

In the same year war broke out between the Dutch and the British. Many of Mohan's colleagues interrupted their practices and joined to serve the Empire. Mohan was flushed by his own loyalty to the Crown and he began to canvass for Indian volunteers. There was criticism and opposition and some questioned his ethical justification for joining in the suppression of a people's legitimate bid for freedom. Yet when he convened a meeting, a hundred English-speaking Indians gathered within hours at his office, and after a medical examination offered their unreserved and unconditional service, without pay. In a letter to the Colonial Secretary they stated, “We do not know how to handle arms. It is not our fault. It is perhaps our misfortune that we cannot, but it may be there are other duties no less important to be performed on the battlefield and no matter of what description they may be, we would consider it a privilege to be called upon to perform them and would be ready to respond to the call at any time appointed by the Government . . . It may be that, if in no other direction, we might render some service in connection with the field hospitals or the Commissariat.”

The offer was accepted. A thousand Indian stretcher-bearers went into the battlefield at Colenso and Spion Kop. They ran in and out of the firing line, rescuing the wounded and carrying them to safety, sometimes twenty miles and more. The guns, the violence, the wounds, the blood, the vast empty country, the sky and its stars affected Mohan strangely. A thousand thoughts pervaded his mind and partially cleared the mist that had settled and shadowed the “Truth”. He saw life as the companion of death and saw death as a new awakening. He saw lust as the cause of war and wondered how it could be conquered so that man's inner nature could be liberated. He

wondered how he could overpower his own lust for the things that gave him pleasure so that he might be released for selfless service.

The war ended. Much official praise was showered on the stretcher-bearers. Considerably encouraged and deluded into thinking that Indian status would now improve, Mohan considered his work in South Africa concluded and prepared to leave for India.

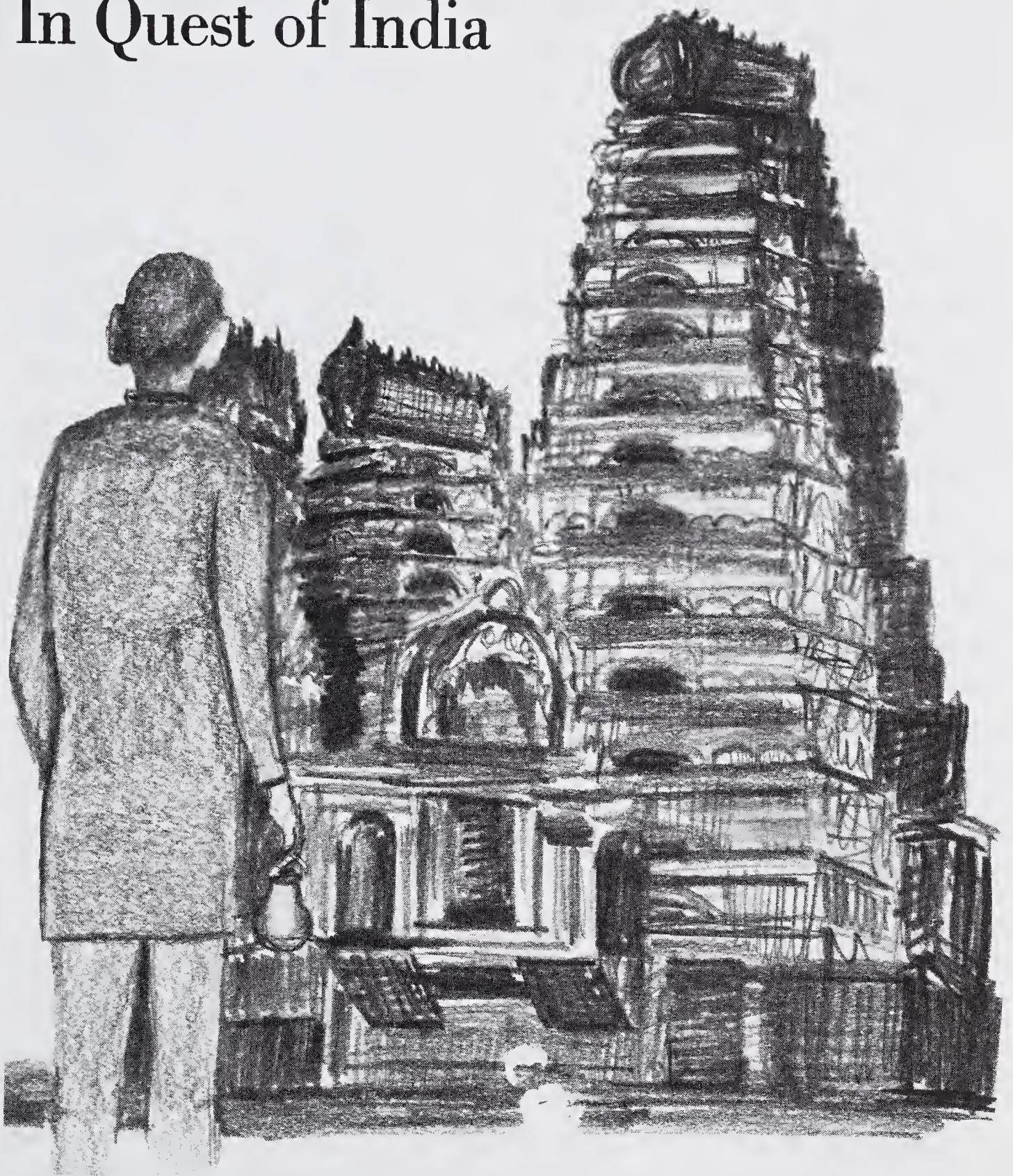
Farewell receptions followed. Mohan's service to the country was praised, his departure lamented and he was showered with many illuminated addresses and valuable gifts — a gold medal from the Tamil Indians, a gold chain from Johannesburg, a silver cup and plate from the Kathiawad Hindus of Stanger, more gold chains, gold coins, a diamond tie pin, a gold watch from the Seths — Dada Abdulla, Parsi Rustomjee, Hajee Joosub, Abdul Cadir.

Kastur's eyes sparkled. She fondled the trinkets and imagined herself wearing them. She was young, she had a husband and it was her right to look resplendent. Yet Mohan, who had shorn her of her wedding jewellery when he had gone to study in England, had not since bought her even a bangle, though he had earned as much as six thousand pounds in one year. She dreamed of the day when she would bear these very jewels, or perhaps just their gold reshaped according to the fashion of the time, as gifts for her daughters-in-law. But Mohan saw only covetousness in her eyes and forbade her to possess the jewels. They did not belong to her, not even to him. They were the rewards of the community for the sacrifices that the community had made, and they would be returned to the community. Kastur pleaded and shed great tears, but Mohan arraigned his sons against her and put her to shame. The jewels were placed in trust for the community and the family departed with no greater ostentation than that with which it had arrived. Later, Mohan, with the aura of Mahatma, was to persuade his daughters-in-law to

exchange the jewels they had brought from their parents' home for threads of cotton that he had spun himself, to put around their necks and wrists.

Chapter 8

In Quest of India



The world had entered the second year of the twentieth century when Mohan returned to India with his family to live permanently. He decided to look around a little before settling down to work and leaving Kastur and the five boys with his brother Lakshmidas, he went in search of the country to which he had resolved to dedicate his life.

The All India Conference was in session in Calcutta and thinking that he would find the heart of the country there, he attended it, volunteering his service. They made him clerk and personal bearer to one of the leaders. He heard the debates, watched the leaders and assessed the calibre of both. He had expected to see a measure of India's strength at the gathering, something of her vision of the future. He saw instead the violence of caste, saw how it plagued the conference and crippled its unity, its efficiency, its resolution and he realised that the whole country was thus plagued and crippled. He saw the disorder and the filth — latrines uncleaned, kitchens dirty, rooms and grounds unswept; because the people of the caste who would do such menial work were not among the delegates. He took up broom and swabs and began to clean, and the delegates withdrew from him in disgust.

Congress ended, he spent some time at the India Club as Gokhale's guest. He watched the wealthy and the privileged at close quarters and was moved to deep shame by the Princes fussing around the Viceroy in the livery of bearers. He realised

that India herself could not be known through the club or the Congress, so he packed a canvas bag with a shirt and towel, slung a long coat of corase wool on his arm and carrying a jug for water, boarded a third class compartment and became a part of the third class humanity of India. It was a third class status unlike any he had known before. They were thrown together like animals, pressed and huddled, smoking, chewing, spitting, yelling and excreting wherever and however they could.

He reached Benares where millions came to seek God. He followed his guide through stench and swarming flies and the calls of a thousand vendors, and entered the sanctum where others sought God in the midst of rotting flowers. He found no God. He saw the Temple of Kali in Calcutta where the blood of slaughtered lambs flowed before the Goddess, and thought of the golden pagoda in Burma defiled by rats, and he wondered, as he had as a child, where God was to be found in all this.

He went to Bengal and Bellurmath to search out the personalities behind the names which received nation-wide praise. He saw some splendid ashrams and wondered at their ostentation. He heard Bengali music, and its melodies accompanied him for the rest of his life.

He turned away and gave himself up to time, convinced that he would realise what he sought not by pursuing, but by waiting and holding himself in readiness for the moment when he would be called upon to give.

He settled in Bombay — the hub of modern India. He set up chambers in prestigious apartments alongside those of the other advocates, rented a house in a fashionable suburb, and travelled to work in a first class compartment. His cousin's son, Chaganlall, who regarded him as his father, came to live and to work with him. The practice prospered. Gokhale dropped in often. He spent his free time in the law library or chatting with colleagues or visiting friends. But barely five months had passed when he received an urgent request to return to the Transvaal.

The Boer Republic had been taken by the British, but its transformation into a British Colony had not, as Indians expected, improved their status. It had, instead, worsened it and there were indications of further deterioration. British administrative efficiency, replacing Afrikaner informality, had created a Department of Asiatic Affairs which rigidly controlled the entry of Indians into the Transvaal. Many who had temporarily left their homes and businesses during the war found themselves treated as prohibited immigrants. The Secretary of State for the Colonies was expected soon and “Ghandhi Bhai” was required to lead a deputation to him. Mohan’s response was immediate. Entrusting affairs to Changanlall, and promising the distraught Kastur that he would return within a year, or alternatively, arrange for her to join him, he left for the Transvaal.

Chapter 9

Mission to the Transvaal



Mohan was unwelcome in the Transvaal. The Asiatic Department, fearing his influence, treated him as a foreigner and instructed the Indian community to have nothing to do with him. When it defied the order, the Asiatic Department excluded his name from the list of persons who would be allowed to see the Secretary. This was sufficient to impress on Mohan the seriousness of the situation. He saw how in anticipation of anti-Indian laws falling away with the change of Government, Indians had been sold properties which the authorities now refused to transfer to their names. He saw too that in certain locations Indians were being deprived of their leasehold rights, ostensibly on grounds of sanitation. He realised that return to India within a year was out of the question if he was to remain true to his resolve to serve. "The thing is that I shall very probably have to repeat what I had to do in Natal," he wrote to a friend. So offering his services to the Transvaal on the same basis as he had offered them to Natal eight years before, he formed the "Transvaal British Indian Association", became its Secretary, enrolled as an attorney of the Supreme Court and opened his office in Johannesburg.

But his promise to Kastur and his responsibility to her and the boys troubled him. He knew that she would want to join him and yet was convinced that this would not be wise. So he wrote anxious letters to friends and relatives to persuade her to stay in India. "Read and explain to your aunt," he wrote to his nephew

Changanlall, "that life here is too expensive. If she remains there and I here, savings made in this place will enable her and the children to lead an easy life in India. Try to bring home to her that the best course would be for her to remain in India." To a friend he wrote that he was most anxious to fulfill his promise to his wife. "How to do it is the difficulty. To return at the end of the year is out of the question. If, however, she would allow me to retract from my promise, and not insist on coming here, there is a likelihood of my being able to return to India earlier than I otherwise would. In any case, according to present plans, I cannot think of returning for three or four years. Will she consent to remaining there all that time? If she does not, then of course she must come here at the end of the year and I must be content quietly to settle down in Johannesburg for ten years or so. It would be a terrible thing to start a new home here and to break it up as I did in Natal. I do think, however, that if she would consent to remain there for the time being at any rate, it would enable me to give undivided attention to public work. As she knows, she had very little of my company in Natal, probably she would have less in Johannesburg."

Kastur however had no inclination to allow him to retract from his promise and she prepared to leave, though more than a year passed before she was able to do so.

In the meantime, Mohan consolidated himself in Johannesburg. Of his legal practice, he wrote to a colleague in Bombay: "I am doing fairly well with reference to office work. In fact during the few months that I have opened office, I notice that I have built up a decent practice and that I can afford to pick and choose. The public work, however, is of very exacting nature and often causes great anxiety. The result is that just at present I have to work from nearly a quarter to nine in the morning to ten o'clock in the evening with intervals for meals and a short walk."

He corresponded regularly with Changanlall and through him

tried to maintain some control over the education of the boys. His letters reflected his disenchantment with western education. "It would be good to read them stories from Kavydohan," he wrote, "all the volumes are among my books. It would be well if you paraphrased the stories of Sudama, Nala Angoda and Harishchandra. It is for the time being not necessary to read them plays by English poets. They will not enjoy them as much. Moreover, they do not match the benefits to be derived from our ancient poets. You must be careful to see they do not pick up bad habits and that they endeavour to follow the path of truthfulness. You must see that they take their exercise."

His routine in Johannesburg assumed the pattern that had characterised his life in Durban. When law and politics did not claim his attention he gave himself up to intellectual pursuits and probed deeply into physical and spiritual discipline. He lectured to Theosophists and studied Hindu philosophy far more seriously than he had ever done before. He discovered that the Bhagavad Gita had a profound effect on him and he copied passages from it, sticking them on the wall next to his mirror and memorising them as he shaved.

He became a frequent visitor to the local vegetarian restaurant where he made many friends and had an unfortunate accident. A lady enthusiast persuaded him to raise a loan of one thousand pounds so that he could promote the cause of vegetarianism more effectively through the establishment of an elegant restaurant. He raised the loan but the business failed and closed within months, leaving the lady in no position to meet her debt. Mohan paid it. The financial loss did not irk him, but it did his brother, to whom he gave his earnings, over and above his current expenditure.

In 1940 Mansuklal Madanjit, who had worked closely with him in the Natal Indian Congress, approached him with the proposition of starting an Indian newspaper. Madanjit had recently acquired a printing press and he believed that with

Mohan's expertise and financial backing they might realise what had long remained a dream. They planned a weekly in English and in three Indian languages. Mohan saw the general objective of the paper as drawing together the 'European' and Indian subjects of King Edward. If alive to the presence of other subjects of King Edward, he certainly did not feel a need for any serious rapport with them. In fact he remained insensitive to relations between Indians and other Non-whites long after he left the country to settle finally in India. The *Indian Opinion* came into existence. Madanjit published it in Durban and it served the Indian cause with power and eloquence, but each month it drained Mohan's personal finances to approximately seventy-five pounds. There were no advertisers and the subscription rate had to be kept low.

The problems surrounding the paper temporarily receded when bubonic plague broke out in Johannesburg in one of the poorest Indian locations. The infection had been brought from the mines by some of the men. Madanjit, canvassing for subscribers in the area, discovered the epidemic, and breaking into an empty house, moved the patients into it. He alerted Mohan who arrived with his entire Indian staff to assume nursing duty. Dr. Godfrey, very probably the first South African Indian medical practitioner in the country, joined them, leading the team of nurses, and the situation was brought under control. Mohan drew public attention to the emergency by writing letters to the daily press, and the municipality responded by providing them with an old barn as a temporary hospital and appointing a nurse. The latter, however, succumbed to the disease within days and the team was left on its own again. But the tragedy brought Mohan into contact with two men — Albert West and Henry Polak, who became his lifelong friends.

West, missing him at the vegetarian restaurant where they had at times exchanged formal greetings, had come looking for him at his office, and on learning of the plague, offered his

services. Mohan had expressed his reluctance to draw Whites to an area where they might easily contact the disease, but there were problems about the Opinion, which had been neglected on account of the nursing. Impulsively, he asked West if he would help on that front, and just as impulsively West, a printer by trade, agreed and left for Phoenix.

Polak, a journalist by profession, was moved by Mohan's letter about the plague in the press, and had sought out Mohan at his table in the vegetarian cafe, thus finding for himself a "Guru" to whom he gave his affection and services.

West, more business minded than either Mohan or Madanjit, soon discovered the very precarious nature of the paper and the press, and requested Mr. Gandhi's personal presence in Durban to sort out matters. Polak saw him off at the station and brought him Ruskin's *Unto the Last* to read on the way. Mohan began reading it as the train moved out and was so stimulated that he did not lay it aside until he had finished it. In that book he found a synthesis of all the thoughts that had been formulating in his mind since the time he had watched Harishchandra and had wished to be a man like him, since he had seen ShravanKumar and had wanted to be a son like him, since in England he had become convinced that vegetarianism was the only moral way of nurturing the body. The book crystallised his thoughts on the lives of Christ and Mohammed and Buddha, and the two tenets of the Bhagavad Gita — Aparigraha (non-possession) and Samabhava (equanimity) which had begun to gnaw at his conscience. The anguish that these tenets had caused him had recently led him to cancel his insurance policy. Now everything fell into place and presented to him the pattern, the pieces of which had earlier been strewn across his mind like some great jigsaw puzzle. He saw clearly how that vision could be transformed into a practical reality. Ruskin had described a community of equals, living in close contact with nature, and spurning the slavery of modern mechanisation. He saw this

as the true life and he yearned to establish it for himself and for those who would follow him.

When West met Mohan at the station, it was as if he had met a Prophet, electrified by a revelation. There was a brightness in his eyes and he spoke about his vision of the new society, with an intensity that West had never known in a man before. Another would have dismissed Mohan as a raving lunatic, but West responded as if to a basic Christian truth which had suddenly been revealed to him. The Press and the paper were forgotten and when Mohan was reminded of their existence, he saw their future as part of his plans for a new society. They would buy land far from the city, move the press there and would produce the paper as a labour of love, and they would till the soil and grow their own food.

They began searching for the “dreamland” and within days purchased 80 acres on the Natal north coast, six miles from the sea and 16 miles from Durban. Its terrain was uneven; in parts rocky and in others covered with rich black soil. With the exception of a few old mango, guava and mulberry trees, the vegetation was mostly dry grass. There was one large spring and around it were trees and snakes. Stillness pervaded the whole area, and there was no sign of human life, though in the night voices could be heard travelling across the distance and a stray light might be seen burning from a Zulu hut. There was a station, two and a half miles as the crow flies. Mohan stood with West, half lost in the tall grass, and as he looked he saw the passing away of all evil and the coming into being of a new society diffused with the inherent goodness of man, free of all barriers between man and God.

Madanjit however did not like this dream. “Gandhi Bhai” was about to destroy all they had built. Only one member of the press staff, Govindaswami, was fool enough to want to follow him and became a trustee and settler at Phoenix as they called the place, earning three pounds a month and the right to

grow his own food on a two-acre plot. There were few qualified machinists in Durban at the time and Govindaswami's expertise was in high demand. Yet he followed "Mr. Gandhi" and could not explain why. "The man was mad," he said in later years, "stubborn as a donkey, but there was something about him that pulled me". Govindaswami's wife fell in with her husband's plans more easily than Kastur had done with Mohan's, though the women shared the same gentle and retiring natures.

For other recruits, Mohan had to rely on members of his family. There were his cousins and second cousins, many of whom had come to Natal at his suggestion. Changanlall and Maganlall, sons of a cousin, with implicit faith in his judgment, joined readily. His friend, Mr. Rustomji, giving the project his blessings, donated sufficient building material to erect the press and the huts for the families.

The first issue of the paper emerged under dramatic conditions. The machine broke down on the night before the paper was published. Mohan, who had failed to persuade the others to abandon mechanised power, turned to the hand machine with just the slightest air of smugness. West looked at him incredulously. It required relays of four men to turn the handle and they did not have that amount of labour. But Mohan awakened the sleeping carpenters and within a short time the press hummed with printing, with the rhythm of worker's voices raised in hymn. The paper was dispatched in time. When Polak heard of the new society at Phoenix, he resigned from his former paper the *Critic* and joined the *Opinion*. Funds had to be raised for the *Settlement* so that it could be self-sufficient and there were his large financial commitments to his family in India to be considered. So for him the grind of the office continued and his legal responsibilities instead of decreasing, increased, and he was obliged to persuade Polak to leave the *Opinion* and join him in the office as an articled clerk. When Kastur arrived with the boys, Polak lived with the Gandhis as

part of the family.

The press, the Settlement, the community, the office and the family all enriched his life. Yet he did not distribute his attention equally among these and tended to see his family as the least important of all, for his family was in a sense himself. He would deprive it materially almost as much as he deprived himself. As in Durban, in Johannesburg too, the boys were sent to a formal school and Mohan did not have the time to teach them. Instead, he conducted a school of sorts each morning, questioning and instructing them as he walked to the office. The boys never believed that this was sufficient, but Mohan was inclining more and more to the view that education was not so much learning of techniques as it was the learning of ethics and the cultivation of a personality capable of making a moral adjustment to society. He had begun to believe that the Indian tradition was better equipped for this purpose than was the Western.

Towards Polak and West he assumed the role of elder brother and, like a typical Indian elder, persuaded them to marry and not postpone their marriages on account of economic considerations for he was there to provide for them. The result was that Polak's fiancée arrived in South Africa and West returned from England with not only a wife, but also a mother and sister. The Polaks settled with the Gandhis in Johannesburg and the Wests made their home in Phoenix, where Miss West, a favourite, became known as Devi Behn to the settlers.

While Mohan thrived in the kind of family situation he had created, Kastur, unaccustomed to western customs and unable to speak English and hence to share in their conversations, wilted, becoming silent and withdrawn. She could not understand the easy familiarity between the newly weds in the presence of others and became anxious about the impression it would create on the minds of her growing boys. Mohan dismissed her anxieties as Kathiawadi parochialism, but she gained silent support from the oblique censure of her nephew-in-law,

Changanlall, who visited them from time to time and confided some of his misgivings to his diary.

January 5, 1905: "Bhai" (Mohan) started work in his office exactly at 9.30 a.m. Seeing a girl (Miss Schlesin, his typist) in his office, makes me wonder.

January 6, 1906: A few people were invited to dinner. Among the guests were English people, Muslims and Hindus. I felt that they crossed the limits in their jokes at dinner.

January 11, 1906: Smith, Polak and Mrs. Polak, who are staying at Bhai's house behave very freely, which makes me think.

January 20, 1906: At lunch, the guest included Mr. Isaac, Mr. Kallenbach, Isa Haji, Omar Seth, Polak and Haji Habib. I ate my meals separately.

The Gandhi household club had found a new member in Mr. Kallenbach, a German architect introduced by Rahim Khan, Mohan's former legal assistant. Kallenbach shared many interests with Mohan and Polak, and the three would be found locked for hours in long discussions about how life could be lived more morally and thereby more simply. The women would wait in trepidation for the results of such discussions, for they knew that they would be forced to make new, unappealing adjustments. Already they had stopped buying flour and took turns grinding corn in a hand mill.

Just when Mohan despaired of releasing himself from the shackles of legal work, the so-called Zulu Rebellion broke out in Natal and offered him salvation. As before, he led a stretcher bearer corps. Kastur, desiring to be close to him, moved to Phoenix with the boys and spent many anxious days in what appeared to her to be a wilderness, threatened by the very Zulus against whom her husband had joined the British.

Mohan's remaining faith in British justice was shattered at the Front and he found that his sympathies were directed to the defenceless Zulus whom the soldiers tracked down and shot,

regardless of whether they were enemies or friendlies . He drew consolation from the fact that Indians were required mainly to nurse the Zulus whom the others would not touch. Indians and Africans met and saw each other as fellow humans, but the British peeped through the cracks in the wall and cursed the "Kaffirs". Again the field, the sky, and the free air stimulated his mind and the thoughts came crowding in and he began to wonder why man drew barriers against his fellow men. He began to search for a means that would inspire peace and lead men to relate themselves to each other with love. He examined his own life and became greatly agitated when he saw how he exploited and dominated Kastur and revolted with himself for seeing her mainly as a sexual object. Sex appeared to him to lie at the root of all worldly attachment and he resolved to purify himself by taking the vow of chastity and becoming a Brahmacharya.

He now saw how important was his mother's influence upon him. He had loved her but had never felt any affinity for her religious beliefs which had appeared to him to be totally irrational. Now he saw that man, in order to be free, had to be bound, and he bound himself by irreversible pledges, as his mother had, to fasting and praying. When he returned to Phoenix he discussed his new resolve with Kastur in a manner in which he had never discussed anything with her before. She reflected on their life together. She thought of the many occasions when she had wondered how she could possibly continue to satisfy his demands. She thought of him in the last few years, of how at times she would be suffocated by his passion, how at other times he would appear to be fighting with himself to keep away from her. She fell in easily with his plans and they began sleeping in separate beds. He was then 37 years old. The vow was difficult to keep; yet in it he discovered the spring of a new life and he found that he no longer cared for the material things and he was freer than before to serve the causes he had made his

own.

He broke up his home in Johannesburg, his family moved to Phoenix and he prepared to give up his legal practice and lead a life of renunciation. The decision caused a rift within his family. His eldest brother who had been as a father to him accused him of failing his family responsibilities and stopped writing to him. The personal anguish that this caused was assuaged only by the new activities that claimed him.

As if to test his new resolve and shape its course, the British Government in the Transvaal passed the Asiatic Law Amendment Act.

Chapter 10

Satyagraha



Mohan climbed a mine dump and sitting on its side, read the new anti-Asiatic Bill, translating it into Gujarati as he did so for the *Opinion*. He bristled at its terms. Every Indian, man, woman and child of eight years and over had to register and carry a pass, to be produced on demand to any police officer who might accost him on the street or in his home. Those who failed to do this, could be fined, imprisoned or deported.

The Executive of the Transvaal Indian British Association met that evening to discuss the Bill. The atmosphere was charged with emotion. "If any one comes to demand a certificate from my wife, I will shoot him on the spot and take the consequences," fumed one member.

The mood alarmed Mohan and he wondered how he could direct such energy so that it would become converted into a positive force of peace instead of violence.

On September 11th, 1906, 3,000 delegates representing all the areas of the Transvaal assembled at the Empire Theatre. Mohan studied the faces and saw a determination that filled him with reverence. He read the fourth resolution pledging defiance of the Bill if it became law, and explained its full implications in English and in the locally spoken Indian languages. Speaker after speaker rose to support the resolution. Then the meeting, as one, took the pledge. Mohan felt an awe inspiring tremor running through the hall and the tremor was within him. He sensed the people's excitement; sensed too the

latent violence and was overpowered by his own responsibility for it. He was determined that the desire for action would not be thwarted, for action was vital to dignity, but action should take the form of suffering, not vengeance. He took the platform and began to speak. He cast a slow, quiet spell and as he did so, bound Hindus, Muslims and Christians as one within its web. He told them that their goal was not to conquer and dominate, but to stress the universal dignity and God-given equality of men. He told them that they would fight, not with their bodies but with their souls, for soul-force was stronger than any gun and more enduring than any cannon. He charged them with the ethic of the Bhagavad Gita and prepared to put that ethic into practice in a manner in which it had never been done before. They would fight with truth; so they called their weapon Satyagraha.

In the meanwhile petitions had to be drawn and a deputation sent to England. Mohan and a Mr. Ali, sophisticated and fluent in English, left for London.

The two men worked for six weeks, lobbying in the Houses of Parliament and regaling personalities of influence with wines and savoury meats. Late in the nights he took time off for writing home. His letters were regular and he worried when the replies did not reach him as regularly. "I am surprised I did not receive your letter last Tuesday. I am hoping to receive a long letter tomorrow." When the letters were not sufficiently explicit, he complained: "I am anxious to know everything about you. The letters you brothers write are much too short. This can mean either that you do not have the ability to think or that you are lazy to write. You should write just as you talk. Through writing good letters, the mind grows. 'I am well' and 'you are well,' is useless." There was praise when the boys complied. "I received your detailed letter. It has been well written. The writing too is good," and then spoilt the praise with: "Did you write it on your own or did you get assistance?"

Always he pontificated: "Remember please that henceforth our lot is poverty. The more I think of it, the more blessed I feel that it is better to be poor than to be rich. The uses of poverty are sweeter than those of riches." But the boys wanted things that interested boys; they wrote to him about these and it irritated him. "You have listed so many things," he wrote to Manilal, "that I am confused. It is playing with money. Yet I will see. I can spare very little time from my work." There was, however, a slight tone of apology in his letter to small Ramdas. "I have bought nothing for you. Do not reproach me for this. I did not like anything. If I do not like the things of Europe what can I do? I like everything about Hindusthan. The people of Europe are good, but their ways are not good."

Mohan and Ali returned after what they considered to have been a most successful trip. They had achieved more than they had hoped; they had addressed a committee of the House of Commons in the drawingroom of the House, met leaders of the prominent political parties, formed a South Africa British Indian Committee and left it in charge of Ritch, Mohan's ex articled clerk, then in London; and most important of all, they had learnt that the Secretary of State, Lord Elgin, would not support the contentious Transvaal Asiatic Ordinance.

Phoenix, as always when awaiting his arrival, was stimulated into a burst of activity. Gardens were weeded, windows cleaned, books rearranged, and the children prepared a surprise for him — this time a miniature hut. The men and children went to the station to receive him and they walked back together, he talking now to this one, now to that, until his attention had been distributed equally among all and he had learned the news from each one. They had begun to call him Bapu and to see him as something more than a physical father.

Phoenix absorbed and calmed him as no other place did. He wrote, set types, worked with hammer, nails and saw, with pots and pans and rolling pin, with spade and hoe, and gave

himself to every chore that required attention. Work done, he played with the children, carrying them one at a time on his back, and tumbling them down the sloping lawns till the air filled with the sound of the happiness.

Then he inspected his school. "A school is that in which boys spend all the twenty-four hours," he had declared. "If that is not so, the students receive two different kinds of education." Accordingly, he had established the Phoenix Boarding School which trained students up to matric and attracted boys from all religious groups and from all parts of the country. They boarded with the settlers believing that through such communal living the whole of their lives would be an educational experience, and the mixing together of the many religious thoughts would teach them tolerance. But his expectations did not quite mature and there were things that were in discord with his ideal of non-violence. Mr. Cordes, a German military disciplinarian, bent his students to rule through the cane; anxious parents feared the undermining effect of inter-religious mixing; and there was the occasional housewife who, forced into taking in a non-Hindu student spent secret hours washing and rewashing her plates defiled by non-Hindu eating.

Mohan enjoyed teaching and setting tests for the boys. "Why have I got less marks when I have done better than him," a student asked. "Because I judge you by your standard, not by his. You did better than this last time," was the surprising answer. And he enjoyed nursing. He would take a child from its mother and give it a wet pack or mud pack or Kuhne bath, changing the blankets or the drying earth every two hours. Sometimes he massaged sick limbs under water, and all the time he comforted his patients with funny stories or heroic legends.

And if it appeared that the paper might be late in coming off the press, all the settlers worked together throughout the night, singing hymns and bhajans, and he would order a special rice pudding to stimulate energy and interest.

He believed that the Phoenix ideal led to the good and moral life, which he saw reflected in the life of the frugal peasant. Each evening he dedicated his followers anew to that life, casting them under the spell of his simple thoughts and the timeless rhythm of the hymns and bhajans they chanted.

His identification with the settlers was such that he experienced their joys, sorrows and lapses, in a measure that was more than the sum total of their own feelings. But the enormity of such sensitivity was at times overwhelming. It was as if he had appropriated their very power to feel and react, and he despaired of returning these powers: and they despaired, for the measure in which he wished to make the return was his, not theirs, and so beyond their capacity to harbour and express. At such times, conflict would break out between them, and the Settlement would be plunged in depression for days. Children and adults would creep about their duties in a silence of shame, wishing rather not to be than to have their beings so sharpened that the sharpening destroyed them.

They became bemused, when things which appeared of little consequence to them were blown up to improbable proportions by Mohan. A group of boys, his son included, enjoyed some sweets bought with doubtful money and hell broke loose in Phoenix. Investigations continued for days; the suspects waited their turns in silent trepidation as Bapu took them one by one, and walking up and down between his hut and the press, cross examined each. There were sounds of slapping. In the evening they heard his incomprehensible agony. "I did not have my

supper. . . The deception has pained me deeply, when I could stand it no longer, I slapped myself rather than do that to someone else. I will not touch food until the boys confess. . . Anyone who pities me should request the boys to help me find out the truth." For Mohan truth was not a mystical abstraction, but a part of everyday life, and he died anew in searching for it, and he

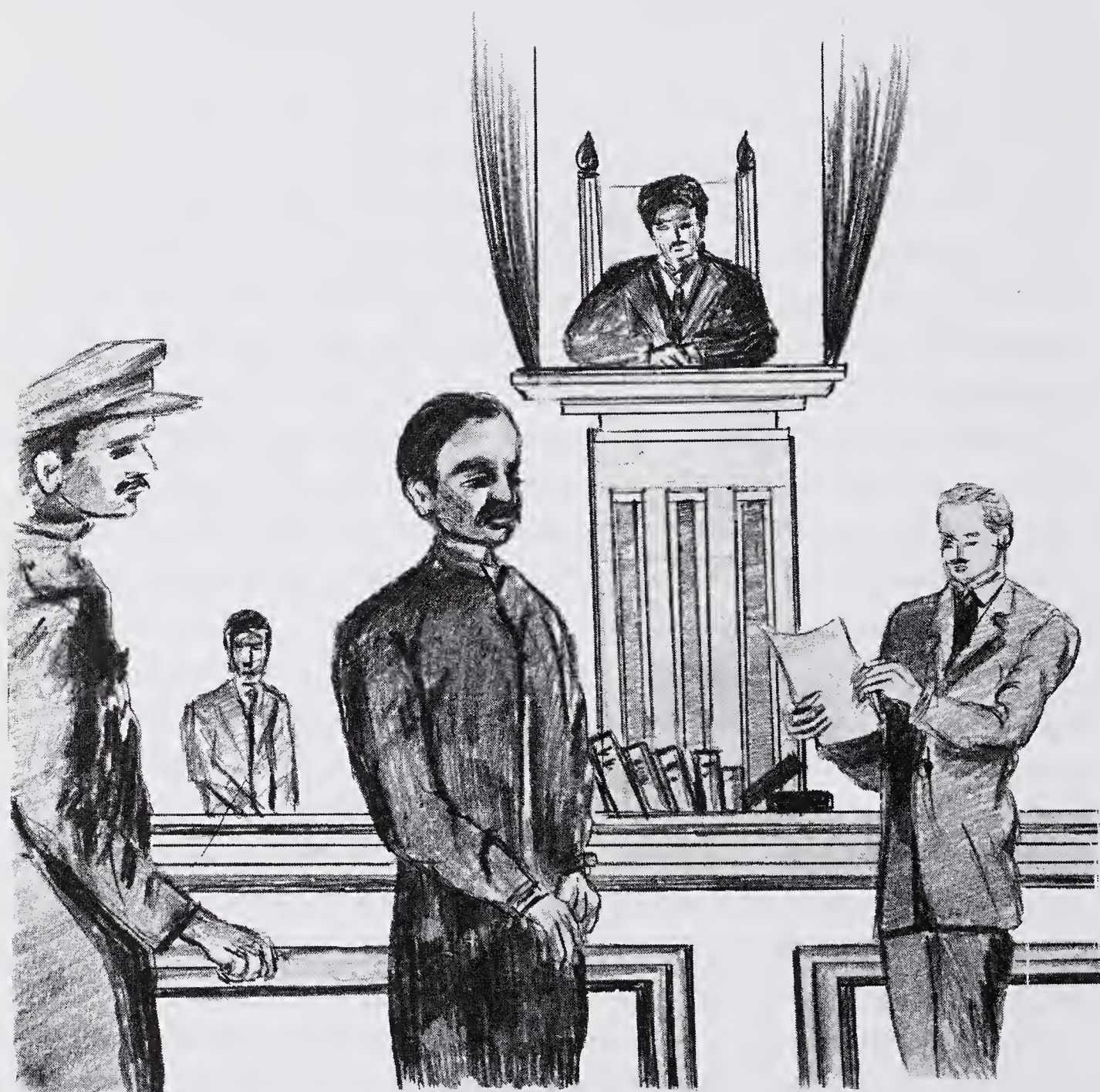
died for the boys who had bought the sweets.

One member deserted the Settlement. Mohan wrote, "The more I think of it the more I feel like crying. I cried when Harilall disappointed me. I cried again when Ramdass thieved and betrayed my trust. Today K. has reduced me to the same end. I love and trust him so much that I suffer his lapse as if it were my own."

And when a good turn was done to him, he wrote, "what right have I to receive so much love from you?" and of one whose transgressions he forgave, he said, "she had descended from the high place which she had up to now occupied in my mind. Yet I consider her good, and it is our duty to make her better. Her sin was undoubtedly great, but we must not remind her of it."

1907 dawned. The Transvaal attained responsible government and within months the Bill against Indians became law. They were required to carry passes from the first of July. The people looked expectantly to the leaders. Would they lead them in their pledge?

On the eve of the first of July, 2,000 Indians gathered in the open grounds of the Pretoria mosque, making the Government nervous. Mr. Hosken, a Johannesburg mining magnate and an Indian sympathiser, came to talk to the Indians. "I am here at General Botha's instance. He has asked me to be the bearer of his message to this meeting. He entertains a feeling of respect for you and understands your sentiments, but he says he is helpless. The Europeans in the Transvaal unanimously asked for such a law, and he himself is convinced of the necessity for it. The Indians know full well the power of the Transvaal Government. They have done all they could and they have acquitted themselves like men. But now that their opposition has failed and the law has been passed, the community must prove their loyalty. I know that the Transvaal Government is firm regarding the law. To resist it will be to dash your head against a wall."



A young man stood up in the audience. Mohan recognised him as a small trader, Ahmad Muhammad Cachalia, who often acted as interpreter for his friends and who had at times come to him with legal problems. He was not very well educated, neither in English nor in the vernacular, but he had a sharp mind. Mohan had never known him to speak in public. Cachalia began haltingly, but his passion soon overtook his nervousness. "We know how powerful the Transvaal Government is," he said, "It will cast us into prison, confiscate our property, deport us, or hang us." He paused and Mohan saw how his face had reddened with emotion as he spoke. He moved the fingers of his right hand across his throat, and his whole body trembled as his voice rang out, "I swear in the name of God that I will be hanged but I will not submit to this law, and I hope that everyone present will do likewise." He sat down. There were condescending smiles from the men on the platform and Mohan joined them but the audience thundered its applause. In the days that followed Cachalia rose to be the bravest of the resisters.

The next day a band of pickets kept watch over the registration office. No Indians entered it, but late in the night there were a few surreptitious customers. By the end of six months only 500 Indians had registered. The campaign had succeeded.

Where was the strong arm of the Law, the people began to ask and the Law was forced to show it. Three days before Christmas a few leading Indian personalities, among them Mohan, were arrested and brought to the Criminal Court in Johannesburg.

The incident attracted wide attention and the Court was filled to capacity. Mohan was introduced as an "Asiatic of over sixteen years," who had failed to produce his registration certificate on demand. He appeared for himself and having no questions to put to the Prosecution, took his stand in the box and "craved the Court's indulgence" to give a short explanation for his action. The magistrate's brow creased in irritation. "I

don't think that has anything to do with it. The law is there and you have disobeyed it. I don't want any political speeches made." Mohan protested that he did not wish to make any political speeches. The magistrate appeared to relent slightly, "What you want to say I suppose is that you do not approve of the law and you conscientiously resist it." He told Mohan that he was prepared to hear evidence to this effect, but when Mohan began leading up to such evidence he was again cut short, telling him that he had defied the law and would therefore be granted no indulgence. So Mohan sat down and the magistrate gave his decision. The Asiatic population of the colony had trifled and played with the Government. He had no wish to be harsh. He could ask the accused to leave the Republic within 48 hours, but would give him more time. Mohan interrupted the magistrate at this stage and asked him to make the order for as short a time as possible. The magistrate's impatience was obvious. "If that is the case, I should be the last person in the world to disappoint you. Leave the colony within 48 hours."

Mohan, as expected, did not leave the colony, and was back in the same court before the same magistrate two weeks later. There was great excitement outside the court. A large crowd had gathered in the drizzle. Mohan arrived on time. A friend handed him a copy of the first edition of the *Star*, other friends sheltered him with umbrellas and he scanned the pages eagerly for a report on the trial of his fellow resisters that had taken place that morning in Pretoria. At ten minutes past two the doors of the Court were flung open and there was a crush to get through. People stumbled in the crowd. Three men were arrested for misbehaving, and once the court was full its doors were closed and police, mounted and on foot, cordoned the entrance, and the case began.

The clerk of the Court testified that he had served Mr. Gandhi with an order to leave the colony within 48 hours and Mr. Gandhi had failed to comply. Mohan was given leave to make a

short statement. He told the Magistrate that his compatriots in Pretoria had been given six months' hard labour and he, as their leader, merited the heaviest penalty.

There was an audible gasp in the gallery, and the raising of a brow on the bench, "I must say I do not feel inclined to accede to your request. . . This is more or less a political offence, and if it had not been for the defiance set to the law, I should have thought it my duty to pass the lowest sentence which I am authorised by the act. Under the circumstances, I think a fair sentence to meet the case would be two month's imprisonment without hard labour".

Mohan was deeply embarrassed. The magistrate had scored his point. They took him to a cell. He was alone, beyond the recall of his family and friends. He experienced the old familiar nightmare of the dark, and felt the dankness on his face. Then he saw the other prisoners as they came to join him, laughing and joking, and the moment of fear was gone.

The warder shouted. They took off their clothes and stood naked and were searched for things they might have brought with them. They had to open their mouths and shoot up their arms and jump astride and bend over, while the orderlies looked in the crevices of their bare bodies. Then the doctor walked down the line and the examinations, medical and other, were over. They put on the coarse dirty clothes of prisoners and prepared to face the grim routine.

In the evening came the food—badly cooked, saltless. They asked for condiments and were told that prison food was not for titillating the palate. It occurred to Mohan that he was still too much given to titillating his palate and he resolved to exercise greater control over himself.

The imprisonment of the first resisters inspired mass defiance and the prison population swelled as it had never done before. The government was embarrassed. Mohan had an interesting visit after only three days in goal. Mr. Cartwright, editor of the

“Transvaal Leader”, came to see him with a proposition from General Smuts. Mohan discussed the proposition with his fellow resisters and a few days later was taken to Pretoria to discuss the matter personally with the General. General Smuts was charming. He told Mr. Gandhi how pleased he was to see him, how he too was a barrister, how he had had Indian friends as a student, and how much he admired Indian culture; but what could he do? His hands were tied. The Europeans, especially the English, insisted on the law. He said, however, that he would repeal the Act if the Indians undertook to register voluntarily.

Mohan considered the proposal. Indians objected to the act because it offended their dignity. If they registered voluntarily, then the registration would be an act of grace on their part and the indignity would fall away. He agreed to discuss the proposal with his people. General Smuts told him that he was no longer a prisoner and that his fellow resisters had already been released.

Mohan took a train to Johannesburg and went directly to the house of the Chairman of the Passive Resistance Association, Sheth Yusuf Mian. Word of the release was urgently circulated and a mass meeting was called for midnight. Mohan addressed the meeting. Most fell under his spell, but some reacted differently. “The right order of any settlement is, first the repeal of the Act, then voluntary registration”, they said. Mohan admitted their logic but pointed out that they were being asked to compromise, and the spirit of compromise implied that both sides had to bend. The government had already bended. It had released the prisoners and promised to repeal the Act. It was up to them now to make a sacrifice. If the Government failed to keep faith, they could always revert to passive resistance. “We must register voluntarily to show that we do not intend to bring a single Indian into the Transvaal surreptitiously or by fraud”, he stated, and waited for the reaction.

In the crowd was a powerfully built man, Mir Alam, who had

come to South Africa as a soldier in Lord Robert's army to fight for the Empire. He had not returned to the North West Frontier but had instead settled in Johannesburg to make pillows and mattresses. Mohan knew him both as friend and client. Mir Alam rose now, towering over the others. His thought and speech were slow. "Shall we have to give them fingerprints under the settlement?" he asked. Mohan admitted that the compromise amounted to that. Mir Alam's fury rose quickly as he bellowed, "It was you who told us that ten fingerprints are required only from criminals. It was you who said that the struggle centred around the fingerprints. How can you change today?"

Mohan explained that circumstances had changed, that what would have been a crime yesterday had become the hallmark of a gentleman today, but this was too complex a reasoning for Mir Alam and in a terrible voice he proclaimed that he had heard that Mohan had betrayed the community and sold out to General Smuts for R30,000. Mohan flushed. Two thousand saw his agony and murmurs of angry protest rose from among his followers, but Mir Alam's words resounded over all: "We will never give the fingerprints nor allow others to do so. I swear with Allah as my witness, that I will kill the man who takes the lead in applying for registration".

There was horrified silence and then an outburst from Yusuf Mian, but Mohan stilled him, saying, "I am sure that no one else believes me to be capable of selling the community. No one can swear to kill another in the name of the Most High. I therefore take it that it is only in a momentary fit of passion that this friend has taken the oath. Yet death by the hand of a brother rather than by disease or in such other way, cannot be for me a matter of sorrow".

Ten days later, Mohan, Thambi Naidoo and Yusuf Mian arrived at Mohan's office. Mir Alam and his friends stood outside. Mir Alam had always waited inside the office and it was

painful to see him standing outside now; yet he returned Mohan's greeting, though there was no warmth in it. A little later Mohan and his companions set off for the Registration Office. Mir Alam followed them and then stopped them on the way "Where are you going?" he asked. Mohan replied that he was going to register and invited Mir Alam to accompany him. A heavy blow struck his head. Kicks assailed his stomach and sides. The words "He Rama" escaped his lips and Mohan fell fainting. His companions lay helpless around him.

A Baptist minister, the Reverend Doke, who knew Mohan, happened to be passing by, and came quickly to his assistance. Mohan alone was seriously hurt and immediately he arranged for him to be taken to his home and insisted that he remain with his family until all danger had passed and he had recovered. Mohan remained ten days with the Doke's and took pleasure in the quiet and peace of their Christian household and was moved into a state of spiritual serenity when young Olive Doke's voice rang out melodiously singing the hymn, "Lead Kindly Light". He enjoyed Mrs. Doke's quiet attention and the Minister's cheerful conversation, and all the time his Indian friends came and went, to the strong disapproval of their White neighbours.

In the meantime the opposition to Mohan had grown considerably. It was particularly strong in Durban and his supporters felt a meeting and a public explanation to be imperative. When Mohan recovered sufficiently, the meeting was called. Mohan was on the platform and about to speak when the lights were suddenly switched off and some people jumped on the platform, but his followers whisked him out of the hall and brought him to the safety of Phoenix.

His friends, convinced that he was stalked by death, flanked him protectively wherever he went, but he laughed at their precautions and told them that they were futile since death would come at will. Death came, but not to Mohan. A letter

informed him that his nephew Gokul, whom he had returned to his mother in India so that he could marry and comfort her with his wife, had died within 15 days of his marriage. The boy who had sailed with him and had walked with him and had shown him greater deference than his own sons, was lost to him forever. He pondered over this and then he saw death, not as death, but as a new beginning and found that he had lost his fear of it.

His reconciliation with those who opposed him had yet to be achieved, and he used the columns of the Indian "Opinion" to speak to them and plead his cause. Phoenix comforted him and he drew closer to Kastur and to the three boys; and they prepared to receive Harilal, the eldest, who had gone to India to marry and who was due to return within days with his new bride. There were special rejoicings when the young people arrived and Mohan was pleased to welcome a daughter to his family, but the pleasure was interrupted when a new announcement convinced him that the government had tricked the Indian people.

Practically every Indian in the Transvaal, responding to the "Gandhi Plea", had registered voluntarily and the community had been awaiting the withdrawal of the Act; but no withdrawal came. Instead, the Government announced that the Act would remain. Mohan's opponents called him a fool and warned the people against entrusting their destiny to a simpleton. His followers looked at him with silent embarrassed smiles. But there was a quality of goodness about him which inspired them further, and when Mohan offered his services and fired them with talks of a revived campaign, they rallied again.

Thousands gathered in the grounds of the Hamidia Mosque in Johannesburg on the 16th of August, 1908. They placed their passes in a great black three-legged pot and the air was rent with cries of joy as with the lighting of a match, their documents of bondage leapt into flames. Passive Resistance was declared

a second time and the Satyagrahis demanded the repeal of the numerous acts that discriminated against them.

Mohan was back in prison. So was his son Harilal. The tempo of the people was high, the campaign going well. He read the "Upanishads" and felt a sense of deep peace, but the mood was short lived. He received a telegram from West. Kastur was seriously ill. The tone of the message suggested that she was dying. It was clear that they expected him to pay his fine and return to her. Yet how could he do this? His mind turned to Kastur and he thought now of her quiet courage. She had not been well for some time. He remembered how a few months earlier she had undergone an operation and her condition had so deteriorated that he had been called from Johannesburg. The doctor had ordered beef tea but this was against their ethical and religious strictures. Mohan had been unwilling to give her beef tea without her consent and Kastur, weak and failing, had shaken her head at the mention of the remedy. The doctor had accused Mohan of heartlessness, of exposing his wife to death. The patient was in no condition to decide, he had said, and had then walked out in disgust. Mohan had carried Kastur gently to the carriage, and driven to the station. At Phoenix, they had brought a hammock and they had borne her frail form in it three miles to the house. She had placed her life in his care then and he had nursed her to health. He yearned to be with her now, but he was a Satyagrahi, pledged to suffer in the cause of truth, and her illness was part of his suffering. So he wrote to her:

"Beloved Kastur,

Mr. West has telegraphed today about your health. A great pain nibbles my heart. I am full of sorrow, yet I cannot come and serve you. I have given myself to Satyagraha, and so may not pay the fine. If you keep a little courage, and discipline your diet, you will get better. But, if in keeping with my fate, you are parted from me during my life time,

and in my absence, then do not consider this a misfortune. My love for you is so great that even if you were to die, you will ever be alive in my heart. Your soul is eternal. I will never marry again”.

The weeks passed. He was released. Kastur had survived and he rushed to nurse her. He prescribed a salt-free pulse-free diet. The patient was squeamish and complained that he imposed on her disciplines which even he would not submit to. The “doctor” immediately put himself on the prescribed diet and would not relent for all the patient’s pleading. When Kastur recovered she reverted to salt and pulses, but Mohan never did.

Two months went by. Father and son were in prison again. Adding insult to injury, the government passed yet another act against the Indians in the Transvaal and the concession to educated Indians to enter the Transvaal was withdrawn. A young Parsi, Sohrabji Shapurji Adajania contested the law and was imprisoned for three months. Daoud Mohamed, President of the Natal Indian Congress and wealthy merchant, led a large batch of resisters across the Border to test the validity of their old domicile rights in the Transvaal. They were arrested and imprisoned. Others began hawking without licences. Deliberate law breaking spread. The gaols filled. There were 75 in the Volksrust prison, among them the father Mohandas Gandhi and his son Harilal. The prisoners cooked their own food and Mohan acted as chief chef. Perhaps the authorities thought that for all the rigours, the affair was becoming a picnic; so the group was broken up and Mohan removed to Pretoria.

Convict No. 777 read the Hindu scriptures, Emerson, Ruskin, Mazzini and Tolstoy and wrote letters to his son Manilal. “I hope mother is now quite well. . . Does she walk now? I hope both she and the rest of you are continuing to take sago and milk in the morning. . . And now about yourself. How are you? I have often felt that you require greater personal guidance than I have been able to give you. I know too that you have sometimes

felt that your education was being neglected. . . Education does not mean knowledge of letters. It means character building. . . to my mind you are receiving the best education. What can be better than the opportunity of nursing mother and bearing cheerfully her ill-temper, of comforting Chanchi (Harilal's wife) so that she will not miss Harilal, and of being guardian to Ramdas and Devadas."

He worried about the poor finances of Phoenix and wrote to Polak to sell his law books and law reports "and encyclopaedia in the revolving case", suggesting that they may be offered to the lawyer Godfrey "if he is doing well."

His term of imprisonment ended. The formation of the Passive Resistance Association had unwittingly resulted in a second Indian political organisation and those who had not become active Satyagrahis saw themselves as members of the Transvaal Indian British Association and as such, distinct from the Passive Resistance Association. As the campaign became protracted, enthusiasm waned, leaving a hard core of "true Satyagrahis". It appeared then that the conservative element was stronger, both financially and numerically.

Towards the middle of 1909, the Union of South Africa appeared imminent. General Smuts was already in England. Non-white South Africa grew anxious; it feared that union would affect it adversely. Mohan left for England to express Indian objections, and Seth Haji Habib, representing conservative opinion, accompanied him. Mr. Merriman, representing the government, was a fellow traveller.

In England, Mohan was questioned closely on his political campaign and his theoretical approach to social change, and he discovered that the more he discussed the matter, the more convinced he became of the validity of Satyagraha. The world could be won through moral resolutions; society could be reconstructed so that the existing pyramidal power structure would disappear, exploitation cease and social members

become related through a system of equality. Mohan felt a great urge to sort out his ideas and commit them to writing.

On his return journey, on the high seas, he wrote compulsively for ten days, his mind never tiring, though his hand did, and he changed from writing with the right to the left. He called the manuscript, which contained 275 handwritten pages, “Hind Swaraj”. It became a spiritual classic of the twentieth century.

The two-member deputation returned. The Union of South Africa was constituted. The campaign continued. The government in desperation resorted to the extreme measure of deporting 75 resisters to India. Yet the movement went on and the cost of maintaining the families of resisters, mounted. Mohan decided to house and care for the families under one roof and Kallenbach offered his farm for this purpose—over a thousand acres in extent, situated sixty miles from Johannesburg. They built dormitories for men and women, a school and other buildings, and the families moved into “Tolstoy Farm”, as the second ashram was called. As at Phoenix, the inmates began to live the life of a composite, frugal, self-subsisting community. Thambi Naidoo took charge of sanitation and marketing; Kallenbach ran a school of carpentry and shoemaking and travelled to the Catholic monastery of Marianhill near Durban to learn how to make sandals; Mohan taught languages—Hindi, Gujarati, English and Tamil. The school was co-educational and Mohan, who watched as a mother over her children, encouraged the young people to mix together, unabashed by their physiological differences. He felt that such mixing could lead to greater discipline and purity of mind. So the boys and girls bathed together and at night their beds were arranged together around his own.

But while the response of the little people of Tolstoy inspired him, his sons at Phoenix were discontented and they wrote to him accusingly, critically. He was shocked and angered by

Harilal's tone and rebuked him, writing, "You have sinned in charging me with cruelty. It is your duty as a son not to take notice of my faults. . . a son writing in that manner. . . "But Harilal could not be thus stopped. He was a married man and he had become concerned about his future responsibilities. Without training, without hope of inheritance, how could he maintain himself and raise his children? Was he to continue dominated by his father, offering not only himself but also his family as a sacrifice to his father's ideals, while the sons of his friends became proficient and prospered?

He denied his children the security of professional training while he had helped others to train as lawyers, and even now Mr. Polak's training was being assisted by him. Harilal returned to India and his wife's family helped him and he planned to get through high school and proceed to university. He was determined to be a doctor or a lawyer, even in opposition to and in defiance of his father.

The defection hurt Mohan and he spent many hours, many days, trying to understand it; then he blamed himself. His own callousness and lack of discipline in youth had affected Harilal who had become the victim, but he did not despair and Harilal continued to be advised, consoled, and lectured to from afar.

"There is absolutely no reason to be ashamed for being weak in Arithmetic and literature", he wrote. "You could have mastered these subjects well if I had given you enough opportunity", and, "I feel you are unnecessarily wasting time and money on learning French. How can I convince you how worthwhile it would be for you to spend the valuable time you are now giving to French or Sanskrit? Even if you took a year more than otherwise, to get through the examination with Sanskrit would be much better. Nevertheless, do what you really feel like. I do not wish to be an obstacle in your way. Consider this as the advice of a close friend." In another letter he wrote, "I may disagree with your views, but so far as your character is

concerned I entertain no anxiety". Yet well he might have, for the years exposed Harilal to repeated failure, and in frustration he turned against his father's value—against Hinduism, and against abstinence, running instead to excess, to abandoning his wife and children, and finally himself, to drink. Years later, unshaven and unkempt, he would appear from the rear of a great crowd that gathered on a station platform to hail India's liberator and saint. The emotion charged cries of "Gandhi Ji Ki Jai" (victory to Gandhi) would be stilled by his angry protests, "He is a fake! he is a fraud!" and with the gift of an orange he would go to his mother and exhort that they praise her instead. Then he would leave the scene with the admonition to her that no part of his offering be shared with him who had destroyed her family.

In the meanwhile, despite Kastur's pleading that her sons were not like him and could not cope with the rigours he imposed on them, he continued to demand their perfect compliance with the way of life he considered ethical, imposing on them pontifical lectures from the "Gita". Seventeen year old Manilal joined his elder brother in letters of complaints, but Manilal's approach was gentler. He wrote to his father about his "uneducated" condition and his embarrassment when people asked him "what class he was in" and what plans he had for the future. His father's replies were firm, annoyed and sarcastic. "So you cannot answer the question what class you are in. Next time you are asked, you can say you are in Bapu's class. . . For the moment your job is to look after your parents. Beyond this you need not worry. This much you can be certain about; you are not going to practice law or medicine. We are poor and wish to remain so.

"The development of Phoenix is our duty because through it we can seek self-realisation and work for our country. Man's true profession is that he should develop his character. It is not necessary to learn something special in order to earn money."

Whereas Harilal could only remember his father's discipline, Manilal also knew his gentleness. As a young child of ten or less he had been stricken with pneumonia and given up for dead by the doctor, and his father had spent long nights nursing him, treating him and watching over him. He owed his life to his father. How could he rebel? He remembered too his father's tender letters that expressed his suffering at their parting. "I am overwhelmed by a desire to clasp you to my breast and since I cannot do this, tears come to my eyes"; and his father's praises: "Your letter made me very happy. I was very proud of you. It is my hope and prayer that you will always be thus noble. To serve others . . . to nurse the sick, what other service is higher than this?"

At Phoenix and Tolstoy, boys and girls mixed freely and Mohan encouraged them to serve each other and nurse them in their illness. Kastur watched with fear and trepidation, especially when it involved her son, growing into manhood and thrown into close contact with a young girl. She advised Mohan against such an experiment. Others advised likewise. The girl was ill; the boy, under instruction, was carrying out a nature cure treatment with good result. Mohan refused to be influenced by their impure suspicions. He was at Tolstoy and the young people were at Phoenix. Then he was told that their suspicions had been confirmed. The young people had admitted their guilt.

Only a few months earlier while in London he had expressed his views on marriage and sex to his son. "I was glad to hear of a birth of a son in Kaba Kaka's house. Yet you know my views. Therefore, I also regret (the birth). When I consider social conditions, I am moved into thinking that it is essential for only a few to marry. The significance of marriage is deep. One who marries for sexual pleasure is lower than an animal. Sex is morally permissible only for the purpose of procreation. This is what Dharmashastras also say. According to this opinion, the

Chapter 11



The Great March

present generation is the fruit of sexual lust. Because of this it is base and godless”.

And now his son had given himself up to an animal passion. He arrived at Phoenix—shocked, silent and withdrawn. He spoke to the culprits and forgave them their trespass. Then he announced that he would undertake a seven day fast, “Not to punish those who had done wrong”, he said, “but to strengthen myself. Anyone who takes upon himself the task of showing the right path to others must first himself strive for perfection. I have no such claims myself. Involved as I have been in worldly matters I have had no opportunity to live away from the world and practise austerities to attain self-realisation.” He admonished the younger boys on the settlement who had assumed an air of self-righteousness. “It is wrong to tease and run down those who have committed an error or done wrong. Being human we are all liable to err. It is our duty to be understanding and kind towards one who had committed an error and is repentant.”

On the evening of the seventh day he broke his fast and the settlers prayed and sang hymns and bhajans and it was as if the cloud that had descended on Phoenix had lifted. But not for Mohan. A few days later while busy setting types in the press, he received a telegram reporting the death of his brother, Karsandas, only two years his junior. He placed the telegram in his pocket and continued his work, allowing the thoughts to crowd his mind—the companionship that he had not been able to give his brother because of the difference in their temperaments, compassion for the widows, so many now—his sister, her daughter and daughter-in-law, and now his sister-in-law. He broke the news to the others in the evening and they cried when they heard the break in his voice, but he consoled and quitted them.

A few years later he would be informed of the death of his eldest brother, Lakshmidas, who was as a father to him and he would write to Kallenbach:

“The greatest grief imaginable has befallen me. My brother died yesterday—I suppose simply thinking up to his last breath of me. What a passionate wish it was on his part to meet me. I was hurrying everything on so that I could go to India with the quickest dispatch and fall down at his feet and nurse him. But it was not to be. Now I must go to a family of widows with my poor self as the head. You who do not know the Indian patriarchal system do not quite realize what this may mean. However, I must prepare for the pilgrimage and then leave it calmly in the hands of Him who wields the almighty power.

“These shocks instil in me more intense fearlessness of death. Why should this event agitate one? The grief itself has a selfish touch about it. It is no calamity that my brother is dead if I am to meet death and consider it as the supreme and welcome crisis in life. It is because we fear death so much for ourselves that we shed tears over the death of others.

“These are the thoughts that rule me now. I shall not write another letter just now. This has written itself”.

The struggle had become too protracted, and with the protraction had come a cooling of enthusiasm so that there came a time when there were hardly any Satyagrahis left. Yet those at Tolstoy and Phoenix saw themselves as the living opposition to colour discrimination, and Mohan philosophically considered the struggle to be just beginning rather than petering out.

At this critical point, the Honourable Gopal Krishna Gokhale, a member of the vice-regal Council of India visited South Africa. The Government in Pretoria acted as his official host; the Railway Department placed a special salon at his disposal and the mayors of each major city accorded him civic receptions. His visit gave Indian prestige a new vitality and the Passive Resistance Association with which he worked closely, basked in his reflected glory.

Mohan, who had been drawn to Gokhale in India, saw him as his political Guru. But he was not beyond giving him advice and Gokhale clearly valued and respected such advice though at times the exuberance and extreme asceticism of the younger man amused him. Despite the fact that Gokhale was a flawless English speaker, Mohan insisted that he address Indian gatherings in his home language, Marathi, even though few local Indians understood it; and to his amazement, offered to translate despite his very poor grasp of the language.

Gokhale met the Cabinet in Pretoria; Mohan had briefed him

on the Indian problem, setting out the main points in a twenty page summary. He returned from the interview and informed Mohan that the hated legislations would be repealed: there was hence no need for the campaign to continue or for Mohan to remain in South Africa. Mohan had his doubts about this and expressed them openly. Yet he promised that he would return to India within a year. In the meantime, he and Kallenbach said a long farewell to their illustrious guest, accompanying him to Zanzibar, and the trip gave them an opportunity to spend a few pleasant days together, relaxing and talking about India, her problems and her politicians.

On their return Mohan was detained for failing to have proper papers. Kallenbach, also without such papers was, however, instantly issued a permit. This infuriated Kallenbach, and while Mohan waited for matters to be sorted out, he stamped up and down the little office and with mockery chanted, "You are an Asiatic. You have a black skin. I am a European. I have a white skin. See!" Fortunately, the local Indian community had prepared a reception for the famous South African and through their efforts, Mohan was released after a few hours.

In South Africa, Gokhale's expectations proved ill-founded. The dignity of India was now for the first time directly linked with that of South African Indians. An undertaking given to her representative, Gokhale, had been flouted. The struggle would have to be sharpened. Mohan pin-pointed the poll tax legislation as the main target of their attack. But first, new enthusiasm had to be injected into a campaign that had flagged and how to raise this became a problem. A new judgment declared illegal all marriages contracted through non-Christian rites and not registered. With one stroke, the wives of most Muslims, Hindus and Zoroastrians became concubines, their children illegitimate and both ceased to be automatically entitled to inheritance as wives and children.

Mohan had never before appealed to women but he decided

to do so now, hoping thereby to open the gates of a new political flood. His hopes were realised in a manner beyond expectations.

Eleven women, mostly Tamil-speaking ex-inmates of Tolstoy Farm, one pregnant and six with babies in arms, responded to Mohan's appeal. Accompanied by Kallenbach, they crossed the border into the Orange Free State, thereby breaking the provincial barrier against Indians. The expected arrests did not follow. They crossed into Natal, thus breaking the law in another province, but still no arrests followed. They settled in Newcastle in the home of Mrs. David Lazarus and following instructions from Mohan, called on the coal miners to strike in protest against the poll tax of three pounds.

Natal was the new centre of resistance. Mohan moved the inmates of Tolstoy Farm to Phoenix and prepared the entire adult population for one massive act of resistance. Kastur and her two sons, Manilal and Ramdas were among the resisters and, among the few non-family members was the machinist, Govindasamy.

On the appointed day, Mohan warned the recruits of the rigours of prison life and invited those with second thoughts to withdraw; none did so. Then he bade one of them lead the Resisters in devotional singing; their devotions done, they set out on their journey, walking to the station carrying bedding and food, and then travelling to the border of the Transvaal by train.

Unlike the Transvaal women, the Phoenix resisters succeeded in being arrested and were sentenced to three months' imprisonment. Their arrests inspired others to resist and Mohan was elated when he saw how the wealthy Parsi Rustomji and Imam Bawazar, accustomed to soft and ostentatious living, joined the rank of prisoners. The resistance was growing, and the authorities could no longer afford to ignore the Transvaal women agitating on the coal mines. They too were arrested. Their imprisonment had an electric effect on the miners, drawn close to them in recent days, and they came out on strike in protest.

Their employers called on them to return, but when they saw that their call fell on deaf ears, they cut off their fuel and food supplied. Mohan, alert to the events and possible developments, rushed to Newcastle accompanied by his former Secretary, Sonia Shlesin, a young woman with boyishly short hair who had been brought to him a few years earlier at the age of sixteen by Kallenbach. He had said at the time, "This girl has been entrusted to me by her mother. She is clever and honest but she is very mischievous and impetuous, perhaps even insolent. You keep her if you can manage her." Within weeks she had taken over managing both him and his office and now he exposed her talents to managing a political campaign.

They held a meeting with the local Action Committee, headed by the Seedat family, and decided to move the miners from the compounds so that they could care for them in their strained conditions. Some Whites were moved to give assistance. A group in Johannesburg offered financial help and a woman in Newcastle put her home at their disposal. The evacuees began pouring into the town, delicate looking men and women with boxes on their heads and bundles and children in arms. The committee had had no idea of how many would come and the large number astounded them. The normal population of Newcastle was 3,000 and now, suddenly, there were 8,000 people! The existing amenities of the little town could not withstand such pressure. The Mayor panicked. The prison authorities looked on helplessly. They could arrest them, but where would they put them? Mohan watched as they came—thin men and small women, and their spindly children, and he saw a crusade and he knew that the crusade had to be led. There were problems of food, hazards of health and conflict, for there were more than 5,000 people of all ages and both sexes; but Mohan was determined that the crusade would succeed and that it would not be destroyed from within.

One solution occurred to him; that they should continue

walking and so remain active and occupied. They could aim to reach Tolstoy Farm, a distance of 500 miles and they could settle there, unless of course they were all arrested on the way for breaking the provincial barrier. But what a resistance that would be! He discussed his plans with the others and they decided to march.

The mine owners, administering their affairs from Durban, summoned Mohan and told him to stop the nonsense. "It is in your hands to do so", he replied, "you can fight the labourers' battle for them. If you ask the Government to take off the tax of three pounds, I do not think they will refuse to repeal it. You can also educate European opinion on the question".

There was impatience. What had the three pounds to do with the strike? Mohan explained that the strike was the only weapon in the hands of the workers, that the tax was imposed in the interest of the mine owners who did not wish that they should work as freemen, and therefore the strike would continue for as long as the tax continued.

They spoke to him now almost through clenched teeth. "You will not then advise the labourers to return to work?"

"I am sorry, I can't".

"Do you know what will be the consequences?"

"I know. I have complete awareness of my responsibility".

"Yes, indeed. You have nothing to lose. But will you compensate the misguided labourers for the damage you will cause them?"

Mohan assured them that the workers were fully conscious of the losses they would suffer and ended the interview declaring, "I cannot conceive a greater loss to man than the loss of his self-respect and it is a matter of deep satisfaction to me that the labourers have realised this fundamental principle".

In Newcastle the marchers separated into groups and were placed in the charge of P.K. Naidoo, Albert Christopher, Kallenbach and Sonia Schlesin. Mohan addressed them briefly

on the discipline to be upheld and the hardships to be faced.

It was the 29th of October 1913, the eve of Sarajevo, when a Serb attempting to wrench freedom from an imperial yoke by a single act of violence plunged the world into the bloodbath of the Great World War, thus sacrificing eight million young men, maiming twice as many for life and exposing the rest to disease and famine. On that eve, an apparently insignificant five thousand invoked their ancient god-heroes and set out to win freedom through peace. They walked until it was too dark to see their way. They then rested under the stars for the night and their leaders served them rations and offered them words of comfort. At dawn, the police came with warrants of arrest for a hundred and fifty, and a promise of more to follow, but the march continued. By evening they reached Charlestown. Hot food simmered in beaten copper pots on open grates in the yard of the local mosque. Beds were prepared in private homes and community halls and the Satyagrahis had a good night's rest.

Beyond Charlestown lay the Transvaal border and possible arrest. Report of White anger and threats of violence came from Volksrust. Kallenbach returning from a meeting confirmed the aggressive mood over the border. Mohan decided to negotiate with the Government. He wrote to General Smuts offering to call off the march if the three pound tax was abolished. His letter was ignored. He sent a telegram. The silence remained, so he phoned the General and spoke to his secretary. He told her that they were ready to march into the Transvaal, that the Europeans in Volksrust were excited and violence could be expected; that it was up to the General to prevent a holocaust. The General's rebuff was cold and calculated. He informed him, through his secretary, that he was not interested in Mr. Gandhi's tactics.

The Resisters picked up their meagre bundles and the march continued. They reached the stream that separated the two provinces. Mohan hesitated a moment. Would there be vio-

lence? He had instructed his followers to press ahead but to offer no counter-violence no matter what the provocation. Would they abide by their pledge when they saw their women and children attacked? But even as his mind struggled with such thoughts, a wave of excitement surged through the Resisters, sweeping them across the stream. The Provincial barrier was broken. They were in the Transvaal. They had broken the law. A police patrol stood by. Mohan approached it, but found that it had no instructions to arrest. The Resisters marched through the main street of Volksrust. The Whites looked on, but not one moved towards them. Volksrust receded behind them. The tension passed.

They reached Palmsford towards evening, when a line of cooking pots and fires lit up the veld. Mohan and his lieutenants took up their meal-time routine, ladling out the food and ensuring that none went without nor felt discriminated against. A woman grumbled—the dhal was too thin; a man said that his ration could not fill the belly of a bird. Someone asked for cigarettes. Mohan moved quickly to answer the complaints, apologising, assuaging, inspiring. Smiles replaced frowns and frustration was relieved.

Somewhere along the line a baby died. The day before one had slipped from its mother's arms, fallen into a stream and drowned. Such tragedies threatened to exhaust all Mohan's emotional resources, bringing him into solitary confrontation with his conscience. What right had he to make such demands of poor simple people? The answer was as always—the same right that compelled him to make demands on himself, the responsibility that one man has for his brother.

Yet when he settled to sleep that night a delirium kept him away from rest. His mind refused to dwell on the courageous and the heroic; instead it was obsessed with Ramdharie who had been found with Munian's wife, with Munian who had nearly killed Ramdharie. How many more Munians would

weaken the struggle? Then when rest seemed to come and sleep to comfort, there was a sharp awakening. "I have a warrant for your arrest". A constable stood over him. Mohan roused Thambi Naidoo, asleep close by. He informed him of his arrest and instructed that the others should not be alarmed but they should be allowed to continue their rest and the march should go on in the morning. "He Ram!" he commended himself to God and was a shadow in the dark.

They took him to Volksrust and brought him before the court the following morning. Kallenbach was already there, with a car, to transport him back to the Marchers, if Mohan succeeded in his bail application. A reporter stood by. The Prosecutor objected to the application.

The Magistrate overruled the objection. They sped to join the March and the reporter went with them, bouncing on the back seat of their car.

Somebody saw a cloud of dust. Keen eyes scanned the distance with apprehension. The car appeared and a shout went up and was echoed to the front, "It is Gandhi Bhai". The march stopped for a moment and the veld air burst with shouts of uncontrollable joy. Then the march continued.

Two days later they reached Standerton where the local community brought them food. Mohan handed out tins of marmalade, while a strange White man stood by and watched. The distribution ended, Mohan turned to the stranger. The man laughed nervously and said that he had come to arrest him and introduced himself as the local magistrate. Mohan commented good humouredly that his prestige had risen in the last two days since magistrates and not policemen carried out the honour of arresting him. He gave some instructions to Kellenbach and left, but the following day again he was released on bail and he joined the marchers once more. The next day they reached Teakworth and he was arrested for the third time but this time the trial was not postponed. He was sentenced to nine months'

imprisonment and removed to the gaol in Bloemfontein.

The Satyagrihis in the meantime continued their long walk and reached Greylingstad. Ahmad Cachalia and Amod Bhayat of the Passive Resistance Association, joined them from Johannesburg with information that arrests would follow soon. The next town, Balfour, swarmed with police but there were not enough to contend with the Satyagrahis if they resisted. It occurred to some that they should press on towards Tolstoy. Hundreds broke rank and attempted to push through the police, but Cachalia and Bhayat forestalled the move. Their objective, they reasoned with the crowd, was not to reach Tolstoy in safety, but to suffer for the cause of justice. So in suffering and sacrifice they surrendered themselves to the police. But when they had expected to be gaoled, they were herded into three trains, given no water and food for their journey, and returned to Newcastle. There the miners were forced down the shafts and flogged until they took up their implements and continued their work. The mine compound had been declared prison property!

The injustices against the miners and stories of their courage reverberated throughout Natal and the atrocities committed against them shocked every Indian worker. Labour tensed, and then stopped, factories became silent and the fields deserted. Phoenix, the place of Gandhi, ("our raja", as the peasants began calling him), became the goal of the new march and hundreds of striking workers streamed through its gates. West and Chaganlall, left in charge, called for assistance. Help came from Durban and Johannesburg. Fakir bhai, who had already served eleven prison terms, took over the distribution of food and others attended to sanitary and sleeping arrangements. Mass meetings in Pietermaritzburg and Durban campaigned for support and large quantities of grain arrived by mule train to the affected areas. In other places, the police patrolled the fields and fired on the workers. Many were wounded. Some were killed. The

strike continued. In Verulam, General Lukin commanded the coolies to return to work and when they refused, ordered his men to shoot. A youth rushed up and exhorted the General to stay his orders, "I will speak to my people. They will return to work." The General was moved. Sohrab, Parsi Rustomji's eighteen year old son, persuaded the strikers to return to the fields and violence was averted.

At Phoenix, West was arrested. Maganlall was warned against harbouring strikers and the area was cordoned off by the police.

Long telegrams to Gokhale informed India of every detail and the country seethed with indignation. Mass meetings condemned the South African Government; money poured in to help the Satyagrahis; leaders thundered their protests, and the Viceroy, in an unprecedented step, openly supported the civil disobedience. At a meeting, Gokhale watched a slightly built Englishman empty his pockets on the platform and was touched. His name was Andrews and with him was his friend Pearson. Gokhale spoke to the men and the upshot was that they agreed to leave for South Africa and help at Phoenix while its inmates were in gaol.

Meanwhile, the South African Government had had enough. General Smuts appointed a three man commission to investigate Indian demands, but Indians refused to have anything to do with the commission as long as their leaders remained in gaol and the commission itself remained purely White in composition. So Mohan, Kallenbach and Polak were released, having served only six weeks of their full detention.

Mohan arrived at Phoenix, weak, emaciated and barely recognisable to the children. He had known nothing of the bloodshed and violence during his internment and as the reports came pouring in he withdrew into a state of silent shock. How had a just resistance based on love and peace, failed to move the heart of power? Did God not desire His truth to be revealed?

What was the meaning of the suffering? What Divine lesson did it contain? He moved among the settlers and heard the stories of those who had sought refuge at Phoenix, of those flogged and kicked and forced into the mines, of those killed and those wounded. Then he shaved off his hair and his moustache and donned the lungie (sarong) and upper garment of the indentured labourer and vowed never again to wear European clothes.

He consoled the family of 75 year old Harbat Singh who had shared his cell in Valksrust, and who had died in prison, but the death of sixteen year old Valliamma Manuswami Mudaliar was a deep pain. She had come to him in Johannesburg and there had been a challenging vitality in her eagerness to serve. She had entered the gaol, strong and supple and had left it a near corpse, but her courage had glowed as strongly as before and that courage had become a part of him, "Do you not repent for having gone to gaol?" he had asked, and she had answered, "Repent?" I am even now ready to go to gaol again if I am asked, Who would not love to die for one's motherland?"

The Reverend Andrews arrived in South Africa and scanned the crowd at the dock for the man of whom he had heard so much. Someone pointed out the ascetic in lungi, sandals and staff. He greeted him with such reverence that some Whites who watched were horrified and expressed fears that the coolie would no longer know his place. Mohan loved Andrews and Pearson instantly and they went together to Phoenix where a great reception awaited them. The visitors greeted the settlers with raised palms and touched the children on the brow and recited a special mantra that Gurudev Tagore had composed for them.

The Viceroy's representative, Sir Benjamin Robertson, also arrived in Natal and the stage was set for top level discussion. But of the three-member Commission, two were notorious for their anti-Indian, racist attitudes. The Passive Resistance

Association suggested the names of Sir James Innes and the Hon. Mr. W.P. Schreiner—both respected liberals—but the Government would not agree. Neither would the Government allow Mohan to visit the mines and factories so that he could investigate Indian grievances at first hand and represent them accurately before the Commission. There was thus a deadlock and Mohan announced a third march, to commence on the first of January, 1914. The Viceroy was embarrassed. Gokhale was pained, but Mohan declared that as much as they respected their feelings, they could not go back on their pledge. India's support remained firm. Providence too, played her hand. White railway workers went on strike and shattered remaining confidence in the Government. Indians were jubilant but Mohan thought differently. Satyagrahis should not take unfair advantage of their enemy, he philosophised, and so, against the tide of popular opinion, he postponed the march indefinitely and instead, arranged an interview with General Smuts.

The two men searched for a compromise between the conflicting demands of their peoples. A compromise was reached. While the composition of the Commission would remain unaltered, and hence on principle Mohan's group would not cooperate and give evidence before it, all Satyagrahis would be released and the poll tax would be abolished. Indian marriages valid under Indian law would be recognised in South Africa and existing laws would be administered in a just manner with due regard to vested rights of Indians.

But Mohan had learnt from experience that verbal agreements meant little to General Smuts and so he committed the main points of their discussion to writing and sent these to the General for confirmation. The General confirmed the points in a returning letter, but emphasised that as far as changes in existing legislation were concerned, these would have to await the outcome of the Solomon Commission.

The Commission went to work. Sir Benjamin Roberts per-

suaded Indians to give evidence. The Natal Indian Congress which Mohan had founded and on which he had at one time served as secretary, officially opposed him, but Mohan's stand of non-co-operation had popular support and few Indians volunteered to give evidence. Yet criticism against Mohan was not confined to congress; it was shared by extreme wing politicians and their opposition sharpened when the limited nature of the settlement became apparent. There were accusations that he was allowing a strategic moment to pass without using it to maximum advantage. His dependence on White leaders too, evoked hostility; hence though his negotiations with Smuts appeared to be proceeding well, and at Phoenix hundreds of Satyagrahis came to pay respects to their "raja who gingerly offered them sweetmeats donated by local vendors, there were loud rumours of a conspiracy against his life. Mohan took note of the threat and wrote to Chaganlal, who was his heir as head of the family.

"If I should die, I should like you to remain at Phoenix. Harilal will have to find his own means. Phulie (his sister Gokie's widowed daughter) has sufficient money of her own and we do not have to worry about her. If Goki Ben (his sister) Nankoor Bhabi and Ganga Bhabi (the wives of his brothers) choose to live at Phoenix, they will add lustre to its life. If they choose to live on their own, then small allowances must be settled on them but they should entrust their children to you. Ba (Kastur) must appreciate that she will be living with you and you will take charge of the children. If, however, Harilal wishes to care for her, that is good and he should be allowed to do so."

He emphasised the ideal of a simple rural life and expressed himself strongly against involvement in wedding expenditures and dowries. "We should give away our daughters with the gift of a tulsi leaf. We must not be burdened with superficial kutum responsibilities, but set our minds towards salvation through service".

Personal matters settled, he turned once again to the community, addressing meetings and inspiring confidence. The threats died down. The work of the Solomon Commission came to an end and it was recommended that the poll tax should be repealed and marriages contracted in accordance with Indian religious rites, recognised. The Indian Relief Bill published in the Government Gazette, placed the recommendations formally before Parliament, and Mohan moved to Cape Town to follow the debates. Kastur, ill since her release, and under his personal care, went with him and so did his son Manilal and a nephew to help with the nursing. They all stayed with Dr. Gool.

Cape Town fascinated the young men. Mohan observed with increasing anxiety how quickly they succumbed to the easy atmosphere of the Gool household and the special charms of the young ladies. Even more disturbing was a new boldness in their disapproval of him. They were openly embarrassed when some White boys jeered at his sarong. Mohan decided that they should return to Phoenix. The young men were deeply disappointed. They had planned an excursion to Table Mountain and begged that they be allowed to stay for that at least, but "Bapu" remained adamant. "What is there so remarkable to see in Table Mountain? When you go home to India, you can go up to the Himalayas which can contain thousands of table mountains," he told them. The boys left, but wrote him bitter letters and accused him of heartlessness and of scoring points against them like a lawyer. His reply was both paternal and defensive. "You have misunderstood me. You have wrongly accused me of heartlessness. I do not desire you to become hermits. . . Had I found that it was to your advantage to stay here I would not have let you go for selfish reasons of mine. I can't fight against the atmosphere here. You do not seem to have realised how subtle the effect of the atmosphere is! You have not yet developed the power of discrimination. . . I am beginning to feel that I have a special capacity to discriminate between good and evil.

That is why my subtle arguments appear like those of a lawyer. . . . You are finding my great affection too much for you. Sometimes it does happen."

If Mohan regretted the exposure of the young men to Cape Town, he was encouraged by the passage of the Bill in Parliament. It became law without any major changes. Further discussions with General Smuts clarified details in relation to immigration and it was agreed that exempted educated Indians would continue to be allowed into the Union.

Mohan wrote his last letter to General Smuts on the 13th of June, 1914, following six months of patient and protracted negotiations. He pointed out that many major grievances relating to trade, freedom of movement, and land rights in the Transvaal remained. "As you are aware, some of my countrymen have wished me to go further. . . I have been unable to comply with their wishes. . . Some day or other these matters will require further and sympathetic consideration by the Government. Complete satisfaction cannot be expected until full civic rights have been conceded to the resident Indian population."

On the 18th of July, 1914, twenty-one years after his arrival Mohan accompanied by his family, left South Africa. He had come to the country twenty-four years old, a semi-Englishman. His host, seeing him from the pier had wondered how he could afford to keep such an expensive looking dandy. His tastes had continued to be expensive for a while, but the change had taken place slowly and imperceptibly. There had been the intermingling of thoughts and experiences. Now he left the country bearing all the signs of a man who would soon be recognized as a saint— . As Christ became the Saviour, Muhammed the Prophet, Gautama the Buddha, the little boy frightened of the dark became the Mahatma and paid the price of all Mahatmas.

He moved out of South Africa, into India, where it seemed time had been awaiting only his arrival, to put the final touche on a people's bid for freedom; and time had worked through Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the Brahmo Samaj, through Debendranath Tagore and Keshav Chandra Sen, through Dayananda Saraswathi and the Arya Samaj, through the Muslim League and the Maha Sabha, through the Indian National Congress, and the Friends of India, through Sir Sayyad Ahmad and Sir Mohamed Iqbal, through Shaukat Ali and Mohamed Ali, through Lokmanya Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh, through Gokhale and Pheroz Shah Mehta, through Motilal Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore, through Mohamed Ali Jinnah and Mrs. Annie Besant, and through Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda; and so through the Indian heart and mind, inspiring self-confidence and self-respect, and infusing pride in the country's past and faith in her future. Each had lit a spark and nurtured a flame, and Mohan, no longer Mohan, but Gandhiji, Bapuji and Mahatma, brought these together. He moved among the people and the people moved with him. It was as if he moved in them and they moved in him and he became their father, at once hard and firm, and gentle and loving, and so they trod the years to regain their lost dignity, in the freedom that came in 1947.

But it was not the freedom Mohan had sought, for those he had sought to bring together became divided and the country that was one, parted into two, and there was blood and violence as refugees poured out and refugees poured in. He was seventy-six years old, and foremost in popular Indian thought, and had he chosen, he could have headed the new government, of the world's largest democracy, that he, more than any other single person had helped to found, but he did not wish this. He wished only to be in the areas torn by strife. He wished to be among the people. So he walked to the North West Frontier, to Kashmir,

to Behar and Calcutta, and to Naokhali in East Bengal, on sandled-soles and bare soles, saying, “I want to find God and because I want to find God I have to find God along with other people. I don’t believe, I can find God alone”. But the people did not wish to find God and so they threw brickbats at him and sticks at him, and there were those who said, “why does not the old man die?” Yet after they had shown their anger, they listened and those who saw said it was a miracle, and the Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten claimed him as his own and said: “When the trouble started, the fifty-thousand man boundary force in the Punjab was swamped by riots, but my one-man boundary force brought peace to Bengal”. And those who lived in Bengal said “We had gone through a year in which communal differences in Calcutta had been terrible. . . and then Gandhi had come. . . and then we kept on hearing these tremendous shouts, “Hindu Musulman ek ho, Hindu Musulman ek ho!” and Hindus and Muslims were absolutely dancing; dancing and lorries would come full of Muslims, who’d stop, pull up a Hindu and say, “come here, come here, we are going to celebrate. Up!”

But Mohan walked alone, for he saw no God in such delirium, and he said, “It is all dark before me, not only dark but I don’t know if this darkness will ever end, I see no light before me and I am walking without the co-operation of the tallest in the land.”

And there was no light on the 30th of January 1948 when he walked to his customary prayer meeting and a young man fired his shots and the little boy afraid of the dark, who had travelled a great age, and conquered all fears, fell to the ground and died.

Passive Resistance revived in South Africa in 1946, when thousands of Indians were again imprisoned, and was extended to Africans in 1952 in the Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign. It travelled to America, and Martin Luther King was shot dead



